UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

# CULTURAL IDENTITY AND LANGUAGE RETENTION: TRADITIONAL AND CONTEMPORARY TENSIONS

by

**Lorraine Cardinal**

A thesis submitted to the submitted to the Graduate Studies and Research in fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education

in

**First Nations Education**

**Department of Educational Policy Studies**

Edmonton, Alberta

Spring, 2002

National Library of Canada
Acquisitions and Bibliographic Services
395 Wellington Street
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

Bibliothèque nationale du Canada
Acquisitions et services bibliographiques
395, rue Wellington
Ottawa ON K1A 0N4
Canada

*Your file Votre référence*

*Our file Notre référence*

The author has granted a non-exclusive licence allowing the National Library of Canada to reproduce, loan, distribute or sell copies of this thesis in microform, paper or electronic formats.

L'auteur a accordé une licence non exclusive permettant à la Bibliothèque nationale du Canada de reproduire, prêter, distribuer ou vendre des copies de cette thèse sous la forme de microfiche/film, de reproduction sur papier ou sur format électronique.

The author retains ownership of the copyright in this thesis. Neither the thesis nor substantial extracts from it may be printed or otherwise reproduced without the author's permission.

L'auteur conserve la propriété du droit d'auteur qui protège cette thèse. Ni la thèse ni des extraits substantiels de celle-ci ne doivent être imprimés ou autrement reproduits sans son autorisation.

0-612-69659-6

Canada

**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**

**LIBRARY RELEASE FORM**

NAME OF AUTHOR: Lorraine Cardinal

TITLE OF THESIS: Cultural Identity and Language Retention: Traditional and Contemporary Tensions

DEGREE: Master of Education

YEAR THIS DEGREE GRANTED: 2002

Permission is hereby granted to the University of Alberta Library to reproduce single copies of this thesis and to lend or sell such copies for private, scholarly, or scientific research purposes only.

The author reserves all other publication and other rights in association with the Copyright in the thesis, and except as hereinbefore provided, neither the thesis nor any substantial portion thereof may be printed or otherwise reproduced in any material form whatever without the author's prior written permission.

Lorraine Cardinal

Lorraine Cardinal

#308 - 9999 - 111th St.
Edmonton, Alberta
T5K 1K3

Date: April 22, 2002

**UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA**

**FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH**

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research for acceptance, a thesis entitled Cultural Identity and Language Retention: Traditional and Contemporary Tensions submitted by Lorraine Cardinal in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education in First Nations Education.

Dr. Margaret (Peggy) Wilson (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. S. Wilson (Co-Supervisor)

Dr. J. Kirman

Dr. J. da Costa

Date: March 22/02

## DEDICATION

***Ninanâskomon anohc kâkîsikâk îkîpîhopikihkawiyân kwayask***

I am thankful today that I was nurtured and raised with strong values.

This thesis is dedicated to my parents/grandparents, the late Frank and Agnes Cardinal who honoured me with the gift of our Cree culture, language, traditional values and beliefs. I am forever grateful for the values they instilled in me that have proved me with the perseverance, determination, patience and the power of prayer. From this root I have been empowered to overcome many struggles, hurdles, and hardships.

My Father/Grandfather Frank Cardinal was a gentle chief who fought hard for his people. With their love and their support of one another, they held strong to their convictions, they did not have to become something different to belong. He was quoted as saying, "I am very proud to be an Indian and I don't have to speak a foreign language".

These wonderful peoples left me with the words*: "kâyawihkâc wanikiskisi kinîhiyaw'win"* which, means never forget your Cree way of life.

---

And, I also dedicate this thesis to my late Stepfather Jack Kachuk who was a pillar of strength and always provided me the extra funds and this greatly assisted me as I pursued my university studies.

## ABSTRACT

In my home community many people struggle to comprehend how our traditional cultural values can be placed in a practical perspective. As a Cree speaker I have learned from my Elders that language is the transmitter of culture. I am a non-consenting participant in my Cree people's language loss. Many important cultural codes, concepts and ceremonies are diminishing. As is common with other Aboriginal groups, we are too often forced to travel to other native gatherings to learn what was once our own. Some of my people are gathering information from those we once considered to be distinctly different.

This borrowing of a worldview from another culture is indicative of an identity crisis brought about by years of assimilation. Thankfully, I was fortunate enough to visit a positive model with a similar cultural background to my own. My studies and search for possible solutions guided me to a Cree immersion camp in North Eastern Canada. By comparing the language development programs in one Cree community with a Cree community that had not yet developed their own language programming, I was inspired by the power of one community's reaction to a legacy that threatened the stability of its culture and language. The following paper is the result of my literary research and my participant observation in two Cree communities as I investigated Cree language immersion programming and its impact on traditional lifestyles. By carefully balancing the emic (insider) and etic (outsider) perspective I came to perceive these two Aboriginal communities as polarized in their reactions and subsequent actions. Consequently, I have developed recommendations and a proposal for further research and community partnering.

Throughout this discussion I refer to my roots and as a result, concepts that are extremely difficult to explain are best presented as a personal translation from Cree to English. Therefore, there is a prevalence of the Cree language in this paper, which only serves to support my conviction that language is the transmitter of culture. If one theme persists, it is the theme that community cohesiveness and collective vision is paramount and is most often inspired by the Elders. Without this unity and community vision a theme of tension persists.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Nothing is independent. This research project had the spirit of many people who have offered their support and encouragement along the way. With my faith in the power of the Great Spirit and determination this thesis has reached completion. I would like to give my heart felt thanks to:

- My wonderful Mother Angie Kachuk for her love, guidance and patience. In her words I was reminded of the importance of commitment. "You wanted to go to university, GO!!!! But finish what you start".
- To Wayne and Doris Roan for their continuous support and words of wisdom.
- My four wonderful loving children, Stacey, Tamara, Deanna and Ronnie for their love and support.
- My three cherished grandchildren, Coltin, Karley and Kennedi, a reminder of future generations.
- My Older siblings, Mary Willier and Harold Cardinal, for sharing of knowledge and wisdom.
- My younger siblings Ken, Brenda, John, Frank, Brad and Todd, who believed and supported me in my endeavors.
- Dr. Stan & Peggy Wilson who were very thoughtful and supportive throughout my studies.
- My Editor, Valerie Reay.
- My many friends and career associates in High Prairie who always encouraged my ambitions.
- The participants of both communities involved in the research project.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS


Page

**CHAPTER ONE**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Elders as Carriers of Culture** 1

**Traditional Education versus Mainstream Education** 4

**The Culture and Language Retention Dilemma** 7

**The Research Question** 9

**CHAPTER TWO**

**AN ABORIGINAL CONTEXT**

**The Aboriginal Worldview** 11

The Creator and the Natural Laws 11

All My Relations 13

Kinship 14

The Four Directions 16

**The Indigenous Research Methodology** 18

Researching Aboriginal Communities 18

Searching for a Research Methodology 19

**Indigenous Language Immersion Models** 22

The Hawaiian Punana Leo 23

The Arizona Hualapai 25

The James Bay Cree 27

The New Zealand Maori 29

**CHAPTER THREE**

**SELECTING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH**

**Applying Ethnographic Research** 32

**Collecting Participant Observation Data** 36

Making Observations 37

Recording and Coding 37

Field Notes 38
Analysis and Interpretation 38
Leaving the Field 38
**Balancing the Aboriginal Worldview and Ethnography** 40
Participant Observation in Two Aboriginal Communities 40
Nîpisiy Askihk Research Considerations 43
Asiniy Askihk Research Considerations 44
The Cohort Group 46

**CHAPTER FOUR**

**DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF NÎPISIY ASKIHK AND ASINIY ASKIHK**

**Nîpisiy Askihk Background and Setting** 48
**Nîpisiy Askihk Research Findings** 50
Residential School Impact 51
The Cycle of Blame 57
The Elders 59
The Schools 61
The Parents 61
The Government 62
Kinship is Unity 66
**Asiniy Askihk Background and Setting** 66
**Asiniy Askihk Research Findings** 68
Elders and Kinship 69
The Implicit Nature of the Cree Language 71
Surviving the Residential School Legacy 73
**Comparison of Nîpisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk** 75
Variations Between the Two Communities 75
Cultural Adaptation or Acculturation 77
Nîpisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk Education Issues 79

**CHAPTER FIVE**

**REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION**


| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **Conflicting Worldviews in Nîpisiy Askihk** | | 83 |
| **Observations of Silent Conviction in Asiniy Askihk** | | 85 |
| **Recommendation for Participatory Action Research** | | 87 |
| Summary of the Research | | 88 |
| Kinship Considerations and Wholistic Practices | | 89 |
| Consent and Unity-The Driving Force | | 92 |
| **Overview** | | 94 |
| **References** | | 97 |
| **Appendix One** | Asiniy Askihk Syllabics Chart | 103 |
| **Appendix Two** | Nîpisiy Askihk Syllabics Chart | 104 |
| **Appendix Three** | Correspondence | 105 |
| **Appendix Four** | Descriptive Observation Form | 107 |
| **Appendix Five** | Proposal for Exploratory Immersion Project | 108 |

## Terms, Definitions and Descriptions

For the purposes of this paper these definitions and descriptions will assist the readers interpretation of concepts and meanings.

Aboriginal - descendants of the original inhabitants of a land.

Band - means a body of Indians, declared by the Governor in Council to be a band for the purposes of the Indian Act.

First Nations - is a term used to refer to those native people who have a signed Treaty with Canada.

Government -governing bodies at all levels including First Nation, municipal, regional, provincial and federal governments and all their departments.

Indigenous - born and belonging naturally to a place. Often refers to native people internationally.

Traditional - historical practices, values and beliefs.

Culture - a way of life (current and past)

Wholistic - meaning the wholeness of the person or community.

Holistic - a natural approach to health.

Enculturation - means a process of learning from infancy till death, the components of life in one's culture. In this process of learning, a person grows into a culture, acquires competence in that culture and that culture takes root in that person.

Nipisiy Askihk - surrounded by lakes and boreal forest is a North Western Cree First Nation located in Western Canada. Of nearly 2000 people, 25% of the membership currently resides on the reserve. This community buses their children to a mainstream school in the neighboring community.

Asiniy Askihk - In this North Eastern Cree community of approximately 3500 the Cree language is very much alive; taught in their homes and from kindergarten in the schools and everywhere you look on street

signs, banners, books, and films. Traditional land based lifestyle is encouraged and maintained. Syllabics are predominant and highly visible.

Reserve - in the Indian Act, means a tract of land, the legal title to which is vested in Her Majesty, that has been set apart by Her Majesty for the use and benefit of a particular First Nation.

# CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

## Elders as Carriers of Culture

Canadian native languages communicate a deep-rooted, cultural knowledge that is handed down through the generations. Alarmingly, unless there is immediate intervention, Canadian Aboriginal languages face extinction. The "1996 Statistics Canada report surveyed Aboriginal participants which "indicated that 36% of adults surveyed (over age 15) and 21% of children spoke an Aboriginal language. Fifty-one percent of adults and 71% of children reported never having spoken an Aboriginal language" (Burnaby, 1996, p.24). This loss of the language jeopardizes the sustainability of traditions, ceremonies and teachings of a people whose words encompass much more than linguistic dialects and sounds. Canadian Aboriginal languages are saturated with ceremonial respect for the land.

Through ceremonies the Elders share values and beliefs. Without the continuity of language and the teaching of our Elders wisdom and knowledge our interconnected spiritual relationship with the land will become further fragmented and eventually lost. The Elders continuously remind us that the ceremonies and the cultural ways are best communicated in their native language. In their native tongue Elders "can articulate how [they] feel physically, psychologically, and spiritually and know with satisfaction that [they] have been understood" (Littlebear, 1999, p.1). Concepts and implied meanings are often misinterpreted or impossible to translate. If these core cultural concepts are diluted, the Aboriginal peoples who are left behind will not only grieve this loss; the loss will be grieved by the other remaining cultures.

The Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary begins with the statement, "When a Language Dies, a Nation Die" (LeClaire, 1998, ix). When language is removed from Aboriginal people and their customary practices, the cultural context that nurture the tribal bonds are dissolved. Only artifacts of a lost nation will remain. Aboriginal Elders carry traditional knowledge and the language communicates their way of life. An Elder is the catalyst to

the success of a traditional ceremony and the language is the medium. Wholistically, language is central to Aboriginal cultural integrity. Language cannot remain on the outer rims of the cultural circle; it must be placed in the center of the circle where all other components of culture come together.

In many ways Elders contribute to community wellness and cultural continuity. There are Elders who impart wisdom, Elders who model accepted behaviors, Elders who teach in the communities and Elders who are respected for their survival during times of hardship. Then there are Elders who are considered all these things plus they possess knowing gifts of a special nature. The designation of an Elder is best understood in Cree, my first language, as those people who are accepted carriers of spiritual wisdom. These special Elders are identified as the gifted ones and in the Cree language they are described as *'Kamîkositwaw'*, which means they are the gifted ones. Implicit in this word is the understanding that they are the chosen ones with sacred powers. Often used in conjunction with this word is the term *'Ka kiskîyitamasotwaw'* which implies a deeper level of knowing. These gifted ones comprehend their role from within the cultural framework or worldview in which it is given. This role, complete with its responsibilities and complexities, is handed down from generation to generation.

In Cree, the duties that come with this interdimensional awareness and sacred gift can be described, as *'ayiman oma atoskewin'*, which suggests the Elder's way of life, is a blessed one and those who possess this gift make many personal sacrifices. As a gifted person, the Elder's life is not his or her own and meeting the required obligations of this sacred relationship is both rewarding and demanding. *Kamîkosit'waw* are chosen and with this status comes long, adhered to, unwritten traditional beliefs and laws, which govern and guide their lives. The complexities of an Elder's role is difficult to translate outside of the culture because the knowledge is passed on through oral tradition layered with history and rich implicit meanings. The stature of an Elder is revered for their commitment, personal sacrifice and cultural importance.

Language transmits cultural knowledge and the Cree epistomology. As a young girl I attended the residential school. My grandmother and my mother also attended the same residential school. All three of us retained fluency in our Cree language. My grandmother and my grandfather spoke what is referred to as high-level Cree. Conversational Cree is the vernacular of local people and is used in their daily life. The high level Cree has almost disappeared from our community and today only a few community members understand the high level Cree language. It requires regular consultation with the Elders to maintain the traditional connection that comes with this aspect of our language. There are a very limited number of people who recall this Cree and I suspect full command of this form is almost non-existent. While attending ceremonies or gatherings I have listened to the Elders discuss the loss of this ancient form of communication with a sad reminiscent tone. Corresponding with the disappearance of this ancient form of our language is the disappearance of the very old spiritual knowledge. Grounded in the language is the foundation of our epistemologies. Our language evolved in response to changes in the social environment and today with communication opportunities and with perseverance the language and its traditional wisdoms can be carried forward. I believe one can be educated by the mainstream, as long as the mother tongue is maintained then the road to traditional culture remains open. In the Elders and in our language we have the driver and the vehicle.

Historically, the Elders were the teachers. "Aboriginal people see education as a process that begins before birth and continues long after formal education is over. As individuals mature and perhaps attain the status of Elder, they are able to transmit to younger generations the knowledge and wisdom acquired through a lifetime of learning" (RCAP, 1996, p.445). To maintain traditional understanding and culture the education process must recognize this Aboriginal worldview, the bonding of their mother tongue and the importance of their Elders as transmitters. My Cree language expresses this sentiment with the word, *'kihtehayahak'*. This word literally translated means 'old people' but the unspoken or innate meaning is much more respectful. In this word we recognize life as the teacher and the Elder as the advanced student of life. In the article, "Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language and Culture", Marie Battiste clearly articulates the

importance of Elders as teachers. "Elders are the critical link to Aboriginal epistemology through the Aboriginal languages. The last vestiges of Aboriginal languages exist in pockets of the Aboriginal population. There certain families secure them in a collective community consciousness" (Battiste, 2000, p.201).

It is nearly impossible to completely understand a culture without knowing the language. This is true for the Aboriginal cultures. To understand the Elders and to participate in the traditional ceremonies requires a full comprehension of the language. Many Aboriginal people, with an incomplete understanding of their language, have not been able to grasp the spiritual teachings of the Elders. Fluent Cree speakers are concerned and recommend that seekers of traditional knowledge require constant guidance from someone who has full comprehension of the language and its unspoken complexities. Elders have been known to provide English translations, in an attempt to share and pass down cultural awareness but this reworking of traditional concepts is not only broken in communication, it also impedes the ability of many Aboriginal youth to inherit the ceremonies, songs and responsibilities.

**Traditional Education versus Mainstream Education**

In response to the dilemma of language continuity, the case for immersion and community involvement is presented frequently. The connection between Elders as educators of the young is evident, yet contemporary schools continue to struggle because they lack Aboriginal cultural awareness. The schools do not utilize the native communities and their Elders even though they are recognized as important language transmitters. To communicate the wholistic worldview to the youth requires restoration of the native languages. This challenge can be met with the full cooperation of parents, Elders and mainstream educators. "One of the barriers to teaching Aboriginal languages in the public schools has been the lack of recognition by educators (at the elementary, high school and post-secondary levels) of the competency of Elders and other fluent speakers as teachers in the school system"(RCAP, 1996, p.467). When the Elders, the upcoming generations, and the educators understand each other the communities and the Aboriginal language culture will be strengthened.

Language renewal must begin with the youth and their first language source is the community. The second language source is the school. Children can learn to speak their native language even when English has become their first language. "Language renewal and maintenance is easy. It only requires that speakers of a language spend a lot of time speaking to others in that language in a way that what [they] are saying can be figured out by those who do not know the language and that those who are spoken to respond to" (Brandt & Youngman, 1989, p.44). Authors and researchers agree that the school itself is not the main source of transmission of language and culture. Schools cannot maintain what is learned once the child is at home and/or participating in the community. The education system claims to serve the community yet in many instances the children are often in conflict between family and community influences, which are not in alignment with the mainstream education and a curriculum, which directs students toward a mainstream culture. This creates a communication breakdown and tension between all childhood influencers - the Elders, the peer groups, the parents and the teachers. When the community reinforces Elders as teachers and the schools fail to maintain this connection between the youth and their culture, Aboriginal youth lose their sense of belonging as they juggle conflicting messages. Is it any wonder the youth have lost their connection with their Elders?

The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples summarizes years of investigation from academic submissions and extensive community consultations. In this report language is identified as key to cultural unity and the Elders are, once again, identified as the carriers of the culture. This report profoundly states:

> Aboriginals speak about language and culture in the same breath. Fluent speakers, particularly elders, are certain that without their languages, their cultures will be lost, because it is impossible to translate the deeper meanings of words and concepts into the languages of other cultures. (p.466)

In response to the recognition of this passionate concern by renowned authors, community leaders and Elders, the Royal Commission then recommends "Aboriginal

language education be assigned priority in Aboriginal, provincial and territorial education systems to complement and support language preservation efforts in local communities" (RCAP, 1996, p. 467). Educational institutions are therefore expected to respond to the renewal of the Aboriginal languages. Immersion programs are recommended only if "parents desire it and the numbers warrant it" (p.467). To date, the educational system insists on teachers being certified in language instruction. If the mainstream educators become trapped in their certification procedure, this can eliminate the Elders' as teachers.

The Royal Commission report refers to Elders, repeatedly, as the main source of language. Marie Battiste recognizes that schooling alone cannot revive or maintain language. The Aboriginal voice is unanimous that language must be maintained in the community if the youth are to become strong in their cultural identity. "It seems obvious that Elders and others who can pass on Aboriginal identity, languages, and culture should be directly involved in the modern educational system"(Battiste, 2000, p.205). The report by the Royal Commission provides further recommendations for curriculum and materials, for certifying language teachers, for further research and language promotion and for gatherings to provide language networks. Their solution is to develop a language foundation with the sole purpose of language maintenance, research and renewal. These recommendations focus on mainstream tools as the main source of language renewal and place the Elders in a complementary role in the classroom. How can Elders be complementary to a hierarchical system when traditional worldviews are so wholistic? If both sides agree that the unified agenda is to retain language and culture - and these two are inseparable- then the mainstream system must adjust itself to complement the Elders and the Aboriginal worldview when educating Aboriginal children. From the principles of the circle we can only surmise that Elders, parents, educators and policy-makers must see their roles in partnership.

The mainstream interpretation of immersion means immersing children in a language program in the school with the co-operation and assistance of the parents and key community influencers. This cooperation insists that the community and its Elders, parents and leaders mold themselves to fit into a predetermined curriculum and

hierarchical agenda. The Elders' interpretation of immersion and their teaching methods is not the same. There is an ongoing conflict between the traditional view of education and the systemic control of cultural and language renewal programs.

> Conservation or revitalization of a language demands maintaining or restoring intergenerational language transmission. Since intergenerational transmission depends primarily on family and community networks, the focus of language conservation and revitalization efforts must shift from formal institutions to Aboriginal communities, families and social networks. This does not mean that other avenues should be ignored. It does mean, however, that the effect of all actions on language use and transmission in everyday communications must be taken into consideration (RCAP, 1996, p.616).

Current Cree language programs are often controlled by provincial government agencies and the schools simply offer them because the funds are available. Today, Aboriginal communities send their children into mainstream society for education and these children in turn receive token visits from community members, which are deemed to represent community involvement. Textbook based language instruction is unsustainable. Immersion must be complete and supported by the community to attain a desirable level of success.

## The Culture and Language Retention Dilemma

Whether language and/or traditional culture can be restored through systematic exposure in the community and in the classroom is the dilemma facing professionals researching the field of language loss and revitalization. "An ongoing debate in Aboriginal language and cultural education has focused on whether culture has to be taught together with language, whether the culture can be taught in languages other than Aboriginal ones, and whether culture should be taught at all if it is not taught in the Aboriginal language" (Western Canadian Protocol, 2000, p.16). A review of prominent writers in the field of native language loss and renewal uncovers a common theme. Language is central to the culture not merely a component of culture. "Because language and culture cannot be separated, language is vital to understanding unique cultural perspectives" (Western

Canadian Protocol, 2000, p.16). It is evident that immersion is much more than a series of classroom activities. Immersion requires a diversity of cultural exposure opportunities and must view the classroom as a compliment to a greater picture. In the school students learn about language and its paradigms; in the community cultural participants learn to use the language in every day life. This situation must include a return to Elders, tradition, language use and an understanding of the cyclical nature of spiritual teachings. The mainstream education system is better viewed as a supportive tool rather than a central source.

Even though many native people agree that language is crucial to culture retention, this does not motivate enough locally instigated proactive measures to protect and reinforce language use in their communities. If knowledge is handed in the classroom down without the depth that the native tongue contains, much is lost. The evolutionary paradigm is threatened because the information is transmitted incompletely over and over. Elders are adamant that total comprehension of the native tongue is essential to time-honored traditional practices and sacred teachings passed through oral tradition. The Aboriginal worldview is grounded in life cycles and the ancestors. Traditional cultures view the beginnings of history as laying down the meaning and value of all history to follow. Historically, before contact, the Elders communicated a framework for life to the Cree people. This communication began from birth and continued throughout the life of a Cree person.

The language and oral tradition conveys a depth of culture that permeates the community to this day. Even though many communities have lost the culturally relevant communication tool of their Aboriginal language, there are strong cultural values and beliefs that have continued on. While Government attempts at assimilation almost destroyed the social fiber of the Aboriginal nations, they have not successfully uprooted the central worldview of the Cree people. "Since contact, Aboriginal education has been used as a vehicle to attempt to assimilate Aboriginal people into Canadian society, sometimes aggressively, as in the residential school experience" (Jeffrey, 1999, p.1). Aboriginal parents and their children are falling between the cracks because they are

caught in an ongoing tension surrounding mainstream education, the frustrations of their communities' disunity and the displacement of their Elders. Many Elders are also recovering from the impact of the residential school system. As the mainstream reaches for solutions to solve high drop out rates and the Elders warn us of impending cultural losses, the parents and youth struggle to balance societal pressures and community identity problems.

Symptoms of cultural tension include a sense of alienation, lack of belonging, irrelevant curricula, absenteeism, language problems, high dropout rates and increasing youth suicide. By revitalizing language, then a sense of orientation will return and this reinforcement of the belonging will empower the future generations. To know where we, as Aboriginal peoples, are going we must first know our ancestry. This sense of identity reinforces who we are, where we come from and where we are going. Our youth seem to have lost their identity. Our Elders persistently work to retain language and culture underneath these layers of tension. When language transmits culture then the Elders can communicate and the communities can rebuild, reverse the damage and face the contemporary world well grounded. Today this legacy of Elders as carriers of culture and this legacy of past assimilation sways back and forth. The historical policies of assimilation took the children away from their Elders and today, as this healing to repair the damage is initiated, Aboriginal communities teeter-totter between mainstream practices and the push to restore their culture.

Although Cree language programs are offered in public administered schools, education policy still focuses on the immersion of Aboriginal children in English programs. Seemingly, culturally appropriate programs in contemporary schools superficially include Elders. The Elders express frustration because seekers of traditional knowledge have lost their language, their kinship and their ways of knowing. This tension between the linear future oriented mainstream and the circular, traditional teachings of the Elders must be balanced if the Aboriginal youth are to contribute to society as a whole. Cultural identity relies on Aboriginal traditional beliefs, the worldview and the language. These things are as fundamental to Aboriginal culture as the poles are to the Tee Pee.

## The Research Question

Having said all that, many research questions revolve around the central concept that language is the transmitter of culture. Research often tends to open a doorway that leads to more questions. In this process of defining the research question I determined that my goal was to investigate language as one of the most important components of the Aboriginal culture identity. My mission was to investigate language retention efforts and language loss in two Aboriginal communities. The central research question therefore can be stated as: Can a community revive its language and culture if the language and culture is in jeopardy of being lost, and if so, how can this be achieved?

# CHAPTER TWO: AN ABORIGINAL CONTEXT

## The Aboriginal World View

All cultures have functional prerequisites that are an extension of their "particular philosophy or view of life" (The Concise Oxford Dictionary, 1992, p. 1394). The individual or group, closely or moderately adheres to these guidelines according to their family and community reinforcement of cultural values. I, as a Cree woman rooted in my language and traditional teachings, can only view the world from the footing of life long learning, my kinship ties and the teachings of my cultural environment. My epistemology began before I was born, was taught to me from birth and is reinforced in my relationships everyday. In my discussion of the Aboriginal worldview, I will reflect upon the written views of some Aboriginal authors who discuss our cultural values, beliefs, customs, ethics, attitudes, traditional teachings and practices. From my Elders, from my family, from my community and from my personal life experiences, I will simply endeavor to share how I view the world from my standpoint.

### The Creator and the Natural Laws

There are as many interpretations of the Aboriginal worldview as there are Aboriginal people because our cultures are diverse and the individuals within our cultures are encouraged to own what they believe. In this sense, ownership means we live these principles and by walking our talk our worldview becomes embedded in who we are. Aboriginal people learn by doing and they exemplify this worldview when they demonstrate living the traditional processes. This demonstration of traditional understanding of our roles is defined and emanated by our Elders. The Elder's lifestyle imparts to us the essential representations of our culture. This extensive comprehension of natural laws, patterns and cycles may take years of learning. Interpretations of natural laws form the central principles that aim to achieve harmony in our community life and personal life.

An individual's competency in conducting ceremonies, in their fluency and in their demonstration of good relations signals ownership of traditional values to the rest of the community. Because of earned respect, community members know when they are very

likely in the presence of a wise, person who has mastered many life lessons. The teaching of the Aboriginal worldview, the principles, the guidelines and the ethics is an in-depth lengthy process. For example, a ceremony may be shared but only those who have this embedded, intrinsic knowledge truly understand and actually are keepers of the ceremony. *Kimîkosiyin pimatisowin* literally means you are given the gift of life. The tone of this statement implicitly stresses a sacred responsibility to live your life wisely with meaningful purpose. *Pamacîsitamasohk kipimatisowin*, live your life, take control of your life by exhibiting respect for this gift from the Creator. Elders frequently say these words in times of consultation

The Aboriginal worldview is the circle. Life is based on the observation of the planets, the life cycles in nature and the seasons. The cyclical nature of our world and our relationship with Mother Earth is the basis upon which all other relationships are framed. This framework allows us to understand how the world functions and is structured. The Mother Earth is feminine; therefore, the role of the woman is structured to reflect the powers, love and wisdom of the Mother Earth. "The Earth cannot be separated from the actual being of Indians" (Ed. Marie Batiste, Leroy Little Bear, 2000,p.78). From the Mother Earth, Aboriginal people gain knowledge of diversity, interconnectedness, cycles and the Father Sun. Observation of the Father Sun, the Mother Earth, the elements, plants, animals and the seasons emulate for us the natural laws. "If creation manifests itself in terms of cyclical patterns and repetitions, then the maintenance and renewal of those patterns is all-important. Values and customs are the participatory part that Aboriginal people play in the maintenance of creation" (ed. Marie Batiste, Leroy Little Bear, 2000, p. 81). The circle is evident in all life; therefore Aboriginal people view life from the natural laws, which demonstrate to us that everything is cyclical.

Both my late grandparents role modeled their highest respect for these natural laws and often reiterated, *'pohko kanakatîtamahk îka kon'ta iyewak kotinamawa kîkway'*, which translated means that we must all be very careful not to take more than what we really need. This warning about excessiveness is wholistic as it refers not only to greediness but it also refers to world balance. In my childhood my oneness with nature and my

interconnectedness with the universe was continuously reinforced. It was explained that I was only a small part of a greater picture, no better than other living thing in our world. This is spoken in my home as *'moyah etipitahmah pimatisowin'*, which means the creator is the giver of life. This life is given and it is out of this respect for the gift of life we are instructed to take responsibility for protecting and cherishing all life. In essence our life is not our own and we are not the boss of our lives but witnessing the impact we have on our lives and our environment provides us with an opportunity to learn how to conduct ourselves with a sense of responsibility, self-control and respect. However, the gift of life includes the gift of free will that allows us to make choices from our observance of our own experiences in relation to the natural laws. This statement is a reminder that the Creator blesses us with life and since we do not own life how can we ever own the land, animals, plants or minerals? On this premise, that life is a gift from the Creator, not only do we not own life we do not own any other form of life. We are simply responsible for our own behavior, our own choices and how we use this sacred opportunity. We, therefore take ownership of our traditional responsibility by honouring the gifts we are given.

**All My Relations**

Embodied in this circle of life is the all-encompassing concept of 'All My Relations'. We all stem from the Creator therefore we are all related because we share the same essential elements, the four directions, the four seasons and the interconnected relationship with our common mother, the Mother Earth. Fire has life, air has life, water has life and the minerals have life. Because of this life these elements are animate in our language and thus must be respected the same as a human life. "The land, waters and all life given forces in North America were, and are, an integral part of a sacred relationship with the Creator. The land and water could never be sold or given away by their nations" (Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000, p.15). The four-legged, the two-legged, the water life, the sky life, the insect life, the plant life and humanity are all referred to as *'nisîm'sak'*, which means my brothers and sisters. 'All My Relations' refers to all living things and our reliance upon each other for survival.

From this core concept, based upon the doctrine of 'All My Relations', the principle of 'good relations', *miyo-wîcêhtowin* emerges. *Miyo-wîcêhtowin, or* good relations reinforces the "bonds of human relationships in the ways in which they are created, nourished, reaffirmed, and recreated" (Cardinal and Hildebrandt, 2000, p.15). Honorable actions toward others exhibit the recognition that we are all family and creating good relations is necessary to maintain harmony. The 'good relations' doctrine guides our behavior and is modeled for us through our observations of nature. The natural laws, therefore, dictate the sacred doctrine, *miyo-wîcêhtowin*, which oversees harmonious, peaceful actions. 'Good relations' dictates our behavior and ensures respect for others in our family, in our community, in our nation and in our world. This closeness and concept of extended family is central to many other behavior codes that dictate our life and choices.

**Kinship**

The kinship circle includes all other living things, the natural laws and the Creator. Language is the key to understanding the importance of kinship in the Aboriginal worldview. By knowing the traditional ways and understanding the language we learn each persons place, responsibility and our behavior codes. In the language, *wahkotowin*, being related, implies a depth of respect. Kinship terms portray this interconnectedness and the codes of ethics necessary for good relations within all our families. Families begin with the parents, extend through our bloodline, then extend on to humanity and then further extend to the animals and plants.

In our kinship rules behavior is governed by relationships with immediate family and beyond immediate family. Obedience, respect, honesty, humility, sharing, love, thankfulness and self-control are all expressed in varying degrees throughout the kinship lineage. Built into the language is the terminology that dictates our behavior and places each of us in direct or extended association. For example, I am governed by the kinship order of distribution when sharing the meat from my son's first hunt. These bonds and commitments to family can override many of my personal commitments. Family obligations always require balancing and prioritizing.

Kinship terms and codes unify rather than divide. Relatives are always acknowledged or addressed appropriately. For example, traditionally, a father-in-law does not speak directly to his daughter-in-law. This condition prevents any misinterpretation of discussions or relationships. Without full comprehension of the Cree language it is difficult to know who is related, how they are related and what appropriate behavior is necessary. For example, *nisis* can refer to either my father-in-law or my uncle on my mother's side. This distinction is important, as without this understanding I could openly address my traditional father-in-law and break a code of behavior. Implicit in the language are unspoken kinship codes that guide many of our behaviors. Every time I hear a certain kinship term I, as the listener, make complex links in my mind. This kinship reference term then triggers my behavior and I know how to address this person and what protocol is proper.

Some traditional behaviors are not easily transferable to the way mainstream categorizes family and family relationships. For example, the grandparents' role in the family and our various forms of adoption are often difficult for other societies to understand. Traditionally, grandparents, aunts or uncles may adopt extended family members without much disruption to the community structure. It is perfectly acceptable for me to raise my children's children temporarily or permanently as need be. It is also perfectly acceptable to raise my sister's children if it is deemed more suitable for the situation. The grandmother's role, the aunt's role and the mother's role are all interchangeable on one side of the family because the female's values are considered similar. In the Cree language, *nikâwis or nimamas,* literally translated means my little mother or my aunt but in the framework of traditional kinship it refers to a generational mothering connection.

> The circle of kinship can be made up of one circle or a number of concentric circles. Other circles such as religious and social communities also interconnect with these kinship circles. This approach to Aboriginal organization can be viewed as "a 'spider web' of relations." (Little Bear. 2000, p.79)

As the kinship web expands the protocols remain respectful yet the behavior changes.

Kinship includes not only the interconnectedness between all living things but it also includes life in the spirit world. These ancestors are very relevant in these extended kinship roles. My education in the protocols of kinship includes the understanding that those who travel this life before me and those who travel this life after me are an integral part of the kinship web. For example, although both my grandparents are now deceased I still know their spirit is with me. Even though they are not of this physical world they are an active part of our family today. The Elder's who contributed to the book, The Sacred Tree, explain this sentiment as follows: "The physical world is real. The spiritual world is real. These two are aspects of one reality" (The Four Worlds Development Project, 1982, p.27).

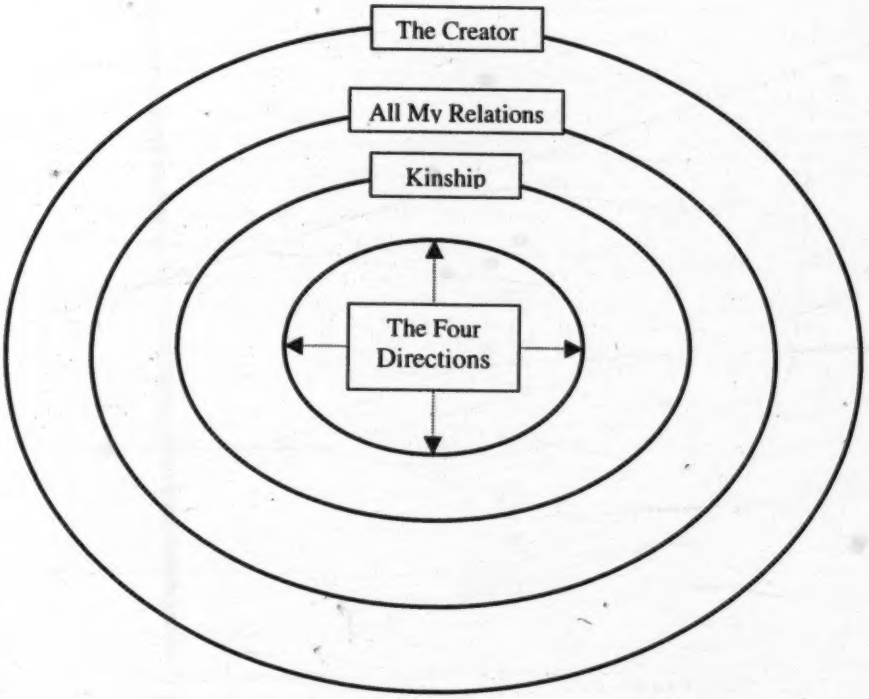
**The Four Directions**

Of prime importance to the Aboriginal worldview is the conviction that each community is comprised of individuals and each person has a responsibility to contribute to the community. Individual balance, health and well being is therefore central to the wellness of the whole. From the observation of nature and from the perspective of wholeness and balance, Aboriginal teachings are entrenched in fours. From the circle and the four directions, the individual, then, understands his or her life's purpose by comprehending their own spiritual, emotional, mental and physical dimensions.

> These four aspects of our being are developed through the use of our volition. It cannot be said that a person has totally learned in a whole and balanced manner unless all four dimensions of her being have been involved in the process. (Four Worlds Development Project, 1985, p.29)

The human being exists in a mental world, an emotional world, a spiritual world and a physical world. When these worlds agree, then the individual is in harmony within and without. The opposite condition of harmony occurs when the mind, the heart, the spirit or the body is distressed or diseased. This distress or disease is a symptom of imbalance within the individual, the community and/or the environment. One is never isolated from the Creator, from the natural world or from kinship.

*This is an illustration of my interpretation of the Aboriginal Worldview. Each circle includes the center, where the individual finds balance and harmony. The center spirals outward and/or inward from the individual, to the human families, to all other life and finally to the universe which is the source of creation - the Creator. The Cree word 'Nîwo' means four and 'mîyaw' means body. The term 'Nîhiyaw' which implies the four parts of the body, which creates a people. The plural of this 'Nîhiyawak' can be literally be translated as meaning "people of the four directions".*



## Indigenous Research Methodology

The Creator and the natural laws, all my relations, kinship and the four directions frame the Aboriginal worldview. From this worldview research takes on a unique meaning because searching and re-searching is fundamental to our observation of nature and fundamental to a policy of community consensus. In the process of discussion and review research aids our arrival at consensus or community cohesion. This is achieved by following traditional practices and the principle of good relations. Idealistically, the Aboriginal ontologies and epistemologies would influence research and inspire the researcher's methodology. This is not always so.

The term 'Indigenous Research Methodology' implies proper, culturally sensitive ways of researching that are designed to positively reflect the Aboriginal worldview. Professional researchers and analysts often claim their preferred methodologies, systems and theories are flexible enough to readily adapt to more recent views concerning the proper protocols and presentation of Aboriginal research findings. Most researchers sincerely believe they are conducting themselves in a culturally sensitive manner because they have adapted their procedures to the follow local protocols. For example, many researchers, foreign to the Aboriginal culture, offer tobacco as a respectful procedure to initiate an interview or completion of a survey. Some community members may be uncomfortable with a tobacco offering made to the wrong person in the wrong place, time or situation. Researchers can simplify or misconstrue this tobacco offering protocol as merely a method of payment rather than a component in a series of unspoken protocols. Indigenous Research Methodologies is complex and distinct.

### Researching Aboriginal Communities

In the past Aboriginal communities have proven to be excellent experiential grounds for researchers to probe into the human condition. Anthropologists, scientists, sociologists and educators harvest the fruits of researching the human struggle. Involved in this process researchers receive public acclaim and academic recognition complete with all the tangible rewards. Symbolically, the contemporary outcry concerning the unconscionable plunder of the land parallels the plunder of the Aboriginal experiences as

a researcher's source of information. The Aboriginal communities of the world have been continuously dissected and analyzed. Aboriginal individuals and advocates for change voice this concern in their communities.

For example, this tension between the research and the researched was recently exemplified when a survey was conducted in a Canadian northern Aboriginal community. Of visible Aboriginal descent but not local or Cree, a researcher was observed walking from house to house with a packsack, interviewing community members. Underlying frustrations and questions about motives began to fester. Local people questioned, *"Awîna awa! Kîkway înitawey'tak!"* Who is this person and what does this person want! (The tone is gruff). What is this research? Research? Research? What are they going to write about? Who sent this survey and why did they send it? Who is going to benefit? Who is being paid and how much? These questions rumbled throughout casual community discussions. These comments, the local suspicion and the researcher's disconnection from the community are reminiscent of many past dissatisfactions felt in Aboriginal communities all over the country. These sentiments express a lack of community cohesion and a general lack of sensitivity for the researcher and the researched. Even Aboriginal researchers confront barriers to success because of their unclear adaptations of the western research methodologies. In this encounter between an Aboriginal researcher and an Aboriginal community, the need for an Indigenous Research Methodology that is guided by the principle of good relations is evident.

**Searching for a Research Methodology**

In the midst of this debate, Aboriginal academics and authors discuss methodologies. Historically, past research left Aboriginal people with questions concerning academic intentions, procedures and Euro-centric conclusions. Aboriginal people are questioning the ownership, the validity, the cultural sensitivity and the Euro-centricity of past research.

> Aboriginal communities often resent researchers - and with good reason. Those who pursue scientific knowledge frequently seem to ignore issues like local ethics, authority, protocols and ownership. By blindly following

> research conventions, researchers have unwittingly and unilaterally constructed the "other." (Piquemal, 2000, p.49)

In the spring of 2001, at the University of Alberta a panel discussion on Indigenous Research Methodologies comprised of First Nation educators and graduate students was convened. Panel members pondered whether an Indigenous Research Methodology could be explained as a research design that reflects Aboriginal wholeness epistemologies. Under the guidelines of Indigenous peoples a sensitive research methodology would entail a comprehensive and in-depth understanding of the Aboriginal worldview by the researcher. It follows that Indigenous research requires sensitivity and insightfulness that reflects Aboriginal values. In this discussion, one panel member commented, "It's egalitarian, it's relational, it's a structure that supports an inclusion, a wholeness" (Lewis Cardinal, 2001, p.4). Always, with respect for the kinship networks, the Aboriginal worldview interweaves an interconnectedness that creates a wholistic oneness between the research, the researcher and the various levels of participants. "It takes a certain sensitivity to be aware of all of these things, especially the needs of those around us, and to put them at ease, even in very informal and ritualized settings" (Hanohano, 2001, p.46).

Indigenous Research Methods are beyond protocols. Indigenous Research Methodologies recognize protocols but also require that the research comes from within this Aboriginal worldview and is a part of the community rather than a piece torn out of the community. If you seek the help of the community by respecting the necessity for consultation with the Elders, by understanding the principles of humility, openness and respect then research takes new directions. The adherences to these principles are indicators to the participants of a researcher's intention to learn. The proper protocols cannot replace what can be seen as an air of arrogance.

As illustrated in the previously mentioned research example, no matter what protocols are observed, or how much ritual and respect is paid to the interviewed or the observed, the internal workings of the community may remain foreign to the researcher and the origin of the research may remain undisclosed to the general population. This is a perfect

example of relational accountability. Relational accountability would include all those who are affected by research activities and findings. There are observers, who observe the researcher! The key element here is collaboration. "Researchers and participants must collaborate to reach an agreement regarding the nature and purpose of the research and the ways in which it should be conducted" (Piquemal, 2000, p.50).

Research is a vehicle for Aboriginal people to find ways to tell their stories. An Indigenous Research Methodology is a vision. "In giving Indigenous research the leading edge, there must be a vision, and that vision must be attained without compromise. The research does not have to have an immediate effect as long as the outcome is positive" (Robust, 2000, p.18). The extending relational sensitivity and personal balance is understood in our language to be part of a larger process. In my research, regardless of the labels, if I utilize my intuition and my cultural background I will know the behaviors and protocols. This knowing is explained when we have those moments of realization or those points of knowing. *Nimoyiyihten mâna ita kakîhispayik*, which indicates a cultural awareness. I sense and I know when the time is right. Implicit in this statement is the knowing that there is a time to search, there is a time to write, there is a time to speak, there is a time to listen, there is a time to observe and there is a time to participate. This timing brings about a synchronicity, which carefully balances all the dynamics.

Thus, in summary recommendations pertaining to an Indigenous Research Methodology recognizes the need for an all-inclusive and community-defined process. Potentially, community members would be included at all the stages, from the determination of the original research question to the assessment of the final product. This research would also include the mental, the emotional, the physical and the spiritual realities - because this is the Aboriginal ontology. Indigenous Research conducted by Aboriginal people who live the principles of kinship, good relations and harmonious co-existence suggests looser time frames, high respect for visionary information and a stronger reliance on oral tradition.

## Indigenous Language Immersion Models

During the 1980s, in response to an identified problem concerning the educational underachievement of Aboriginal students and the imminent loss of Aboriginal languages internationally, a movement toward cultural and language immersion programming surfaced. Sharing knowledge and consulting with other groups is not a new practice to Aboriginal people. Traditionally the hunters scouted the land for game, the Elders consulted with each other and communities gathered together to reaffirm kinship ties. Many traditional practices can be traced to an exchange of information between the tribes. This process of acculturation encourages adaptation of the systems or tools that improve the well being of the community. In this sense the past experiences of other Aboriginal communities is very relevant to Indigenous research methodologies.

The struggles and successes of the Maori, Hawaiian, Hualapai and the Cree Indigenous Language Immersion programs are examples of Aboriginal language and culture retention programs in action. Their very existence can be attributed to their communities' political will, the enthusiasm of the community members and the instigator's fortitude overcoming many stumbling blocks. In all four studies, the impetus from the Elders, the cohesion of key parents and the lobbying of community leaders are pinpointed as crucial to the success of such projects. These movements shared many common pitfalls and learned many valuable lessons. In a review of their start-up and development process one common theme arises. Aboriginal culture and language retention is only possible if the communities find the passion from within to persevere in their quest for a unified vision. Advocates of this movement maintained, "You cannot from the outside inculcate into people the will to revive or maintain their languages. That has to come from themselves" (Krauss in Crawford, 1992, p.30). The following is a brief review of four immersion models that may provide inspiration for further development in other Aboriginal communities.

**The Hawaiian Punana Leo**

In Hawaii a subculture background similar to the Canadian Aboriginal experience, left Hawaiian Indigenous groups with the challenge of recovering their language and culture. Meeting this challenge resulted in the development of a tribally controlled immersion project. Historically, both the Christian missionaries and the Hawaiian monarchy agreed that a requirement for literacy in both Hawaiian and English languages would benefit Hawaiian people. In the 1800s schools were taught in Hawaiian, however this policy deteriorated due to political oppression and by the early 1900s less than 5% of native Hawaiian's spoke Hawaiian and very few children had the opportunity to learn their first language. In 1893 the American conquest of Hawaii by a small group of Hawaiian born businessmen, some of whom were descendants of missionaries, had resulted in the banning of the Hawaiian language in the schools. Contact with immigrants resulted in the evolution of a broken form of the Hawaiian language. This form of Hawaiian is referred to by linguists as Hawaiyi Creole English and by the general population as payiyai. Although, the existence of payiyai became a valuable source for the recent language recovery efforts, the challenge was daunting because many of the payiyai words had been replaced by English words.

Earlier laws to protect the Hawaiian language and culture had not survived and language retention failed because a sincere effort to revitalize the Hawaiian culture and language did not surface until the 1970s when "a revitalization of interest in the Hawaiian culture resulted in the reestablishment of Hawaiian as an official language in the state of Hawaiyi and in a push to bring elders called Kupuna into the elementary school classrooms" (www.ahapunanaleo.org, Dec. 2001). A growing interest in Aboriginal sovereignty stemming from the recognition of past dominance by the English and western traditions prompted the first Hawaiian demands for a locally controlled language immersion program. In the fall of 1987, with the intention of creating an immersion experience that "[protected] the integrity and strength of the Hawaiian language and culture as an independent entity…", the parents of Punana Leo petitioned for two kindergarten immersion programs. (Slaughter & Lai, 1994,p.3).

Paralleling this political will and the creation of bilingual courses in the general schools was an exiting movement started by Larry Kimura called Aha Punana Leo. In 1983 the Punana Leo language immersion program was established and the first language nest school opened on the Kauayi Island in 1984. (Aha Punana Leo Organization, Dec. 2001). Barriers to the creation of strong immersion programming included parental fears that the English language was necessary for the success of their children, the lack of teachers fluent in the Hawaiian language, the observation that many teachers were inconsistent in providing instruction strictly in the Hawaiian language and the identified lack of parental participation in the child's language immersion process. As a result, Elder consultations, parental awareness meetings and adult language classes were initiated to reinforce the child's support network for language immersion. Gradually the programs became stronger. Eventually, "[excitement] grew among Hawaiians after seeing for the first time in more than 50 years, children speaking fluently in Hawaiian with their grandparents and with each other. The movement began to grow explosively and affected enrollments in Hawaiian language courses at the high school and college level dramatically" (Aha Punana Leo Organization, Dec. 2001). Challenges regarding further expansion of this movement and coordination with the existing education systems have required continuous lobbying for equality in the education system, relevant certification methods for fluent teachers, student transportation funding, the creation of classroom texts and teaching materials, culturally relevant examination processes and enforceable hiring standards which require support staff to be fluent in Hawaiian.

Currently, there are eleven language nests (or small community based programs) in Hawaii and funds have been allocated for curriculum development and teacher training. The state has agreed to establish two schools taught and administered solely through the Hawaiian language. Despite this progress and numerous achievements advocates of Hawaiian language retention through total immersion programs still struggle to secure an environment where Hawaiian-speaking students are afforded the same opportunities as those speaking English. There is an underlying concern that fluency in Hawaiian is seen as a subcategory and is more often treated as an enrichment program than as a core requirement for Hawaiian students. The political will is strong and the battle ongoing.

**The Arizona Hualapai**

In 1975, advocates of language retention and the Hualapai people, of Tall Pine Reservation near Peach Springs in Arizona, began the long process of securing an environment conducive to the implementation of a bilingual program. At that time, Hualapai was unwritten and research indicated at least 50% of the Hualapai children spoke their Hualapai language while 45% spoke English as their dominant language. "In 1975, the Hualapai bilingual program was developed to offer language maintenance to a rapidly eroding language" (Stiles, 1997, p.3). Several years were dedicated to curriculum development and a concurrent approach to education was accepted to balance the use of both Hualapai and English. The American Indian Language Development Institute prepares specialized teachers, develops written resources and researches the oral Hualapai language. In 1981, the Hualapai Bilingual/Bicultural Education Program was adopted as an official school district curriculum.

Historically, the Hualapai people lived in small bands or extended families under traditional headman style governance. From 1883 and on, an American reservation style governance was imposed which totally undermined the traditional headman structures, the maintenance of family groups and the retention of their language and culture. Housing projects displaced tribal groups and contributed greatly to the breakdown of family ties and the once strong headmen organization. These changes manipulated lifestyles and control by outside influencers diluted Hualapai cultural strength. Many Hualapai people had lost a sense of identity and connectedness. As a result, early advocates of bilingual language programming faced much resistance from Elders, community representatives and parents who viewed writing down their oral language as a threat to their traditions and to their children's ability to compete in the mainstream. Although the language was rapidly eroding the Elders, community leaders and language aides viewed schooling in both Hualapai and English as problematic. "Parents, products of all-English schooling themselves, thought that combining English and Hualapai in the school would only confuse the children and make the dropout rate worse" (Stiles, 1997, p.4).

Researchers noted that Hualapai culture persisted under the pressure of imposed reservation politics and after years of English education. The Hualapai values, beliefs and practices central to their culture adapted and adjusted to these times of struggle but had not disappeared. Under the surface of contemporary community life family units, traditional values, Hualapai ceremonies and language were still part of many Hualapai childrearing practices. In 1994 Watahomigie and McCarty quote themselves from their previous 1989 research entitled ' The Hualapai Bilingual Academic Excellence Program'. "Extended families trace kinship ties back many generations; social and ceremonial gatherings continue to unite the community; and the Hualapai language, used extensively at such gatherings, is still a primary medium in most children's early socialization" (1994, p.29).

This recognition that the Hualapai language and culture could flourish energized the movement for retention and restoration. After evaluating the required stages of program development, creating a community-based writing system, implementing curriculum development projects, overseeing staff development initiatives and implementing community awareness programs, the Hualapai Bilingual/Bicultural Education at Peach Springs had become securely rooted. A review of their experience identifies crucial aspects necessary for success. One of these key recommendations from the Hualapai experience is the their recognition that community decision-making involvement is most important.

> Gaining and maintaining that support has required no small amount of community education about the value and relevancy of local knowledge in children's schooling. Yet it has been by accessing local knowledge, especially the content provided by parents and grandparents that the program has acquired much of its power and legitimacy. (Watahomigie, 1994, p. 40)

Success is also attributed to consistent funding for curriculum development and staff training. The Hualapai assessment recognizes that their language program's successes can be attributed to the unfaltering, lengthy commitment of the same program director and the cohesive use of internal and external expertise as key

contributors throughout the design and implementation of their program. It is evident that the stability of strong leadership, consistent funding and the support committed experts in the field were crucial components as this process has been difficult to reproduce in other communities because of non-local staffing and unstable long-term funding.

**The James Bay Cree**

In the James Bay region, in the Eastern Canadian north, in 1973, the Cree Way Project was designed by a local native anthropologist, John Murdock, to "validate Cree culture and create a Cree tribal identity, to make reading and writing more important within their previously oral culture, to create a curriculum reflecting Cree culture and the Cree conceptual framework, and to implement that curriculum in the public schools" (Stiles, 1997, p.2).

It was not until 1988 that the preschool immersion program was piloted by the Waskaganish in Quebec, as a reaction to Elders' complaints that the teenager's use of Cree was "sloppy". The next step was a kindergarten immersion program in 1989. By 1993 the Cree Immersion Program had expanded to include grade one and in each successive year another grade was added until grade four. After grade four, until grade twelve, the students are exposed to a French and English curriculum with regular doses of Cree language, syllabic writing and cultural enrichment activities.

The James Bay Cree language movement was closely tied to the Canadian Aboriginal self-government advancements. Historically, the James Bay Cree have suffered many indignities from past assimilation policies, which were largely enforced by the residential schools. The recent generation has risen to fight diligently to bring about a halt to the huge hydroelectric dam project, to fight logging interests and to bring many injustices to the forefront during ongoing court battles. These experiences have resulted in a strong community commitment and vision that focuses on the restoration and retention of their language and culture.

Evolving from traditional hunters and gathers in the harsh northern climate there are currently eight Cree villages along the James Bay in Northern Canada. With unity and conviction the members of these communities banded together to form a government determined to re-establish their independence and Cree identity. Political structures were formed to attain this vision and one of their core achievements has been the establishment of the Cree School Board, which is run by locally elected people. Instrumental in these reforms is the Cree Way project, which developed a new curriculum "steeped in local knowledge" (Marvelle, 2001, p.3).

The James Bay Cree had become accustomed to facing challenges. Their barriers to success included dealing with a lack of research relevant to their aspirations, the lack of education materials and designing a program that incorporated traditional activities in the education of their youth. One of the results of their mandate to maintain Cree traditional focus was the creation of local developed teaching materials, which included illustrated books for grades 1-4, the publication of the Cree Lexicon, which is a collection of 60,000 Cree words in two dialects and the continued development of a Cree Dictionary by the Cree School Board. In response to the communities' strong desire to continue traditional cultural teaching in conjunction with local parents and Elders, the Cree School Board has developed bush camps and special activities that are now accepted as part of the local school curriculum. "By bringing together students, parents and teachers, these programs solidify Cree community ties through an organization which in the past had forced the assimilation of Cree youth into Canadian culture" (Marvelle, 2001, p.4). The James Bay Cree language movement expanded on the theme of maintaining culture and language within an existing framework set out by the mainstream government.

In this way the children of James Bay become educated first in their community and in their native tongue and then in French and English education. As a model for success the James Bay Cree children demonstrated higher confidence in all languages: Cree, French and English. Also, the community members have exhibited a high degree of interest and involvement in the design and evaluation of the education of their children. The incorporation of traditional bush camps, attendance at special ceremonies and events

ground the Cree youth in a self-identity that strengthens their ability to meet challenges in the greater society. The James Bay Cree School Board is one of the most successful agencies run by these local Cree people. The Cree education project is achieving the goal to increase their traditional sense of ownership that aligns traditional values with institutional requirements.

**The New Zealand Maori**

"By the 1970s the youngest native speakers of Maori were starting to grow older, there were no signs of a new generation of children growing up speaking the language and the prospects for language survival were becoming dimmer" (Spolsky, 1990, p.122). In response to language culture loss concerns, New Zealand activated a Maori language immersion strategy under the 'Head Start project' at the preschool level. This immersion project was not community based. Maori leaders held the position that it was necessary for language revitalization to occur from within their communities in what was termed as 'language nests'. This Maori policy demanded "going outside of the compulsory state schooling system to develop change" (Smith, 2000, p.57). Advocates of the Maori education agreed that "[in] the nests, children from birth to eight years of age would be exposed to the Maori language in a homelike atmosphere" (Stiles, 2001, p.5).

Historically, in the mid-19th century, after the European invasion of New Zealand the Maori people had experienced oppressive measures aimed at re-educating their children in English. The process of language loss was slowed because of the strength of Maori resistance. This early resistance to assimilation maintained fertile ground for future efforts to preserve their language, culture and identity. The Maori leadership and families constantly held their stand against English and insisted their language be taught in the secondary schools. Large migration to the cities by Maori people increased the problems maintaining Maori language and culture. By 1970s the Maori people experienced what Bernard Spolsky described as the final blow. In a pre-school play center Maori mothers were being encouraged to speak English to their children. This pressure to teach English to their young children and the spread of television greatly concerned advocates for the retention of Maori language.

The Maori cultural preservation movement grew stronger with the support of the American civil rights activists. An international and local recognition of the importance of language and culture retention supported their priority to create an early childhood immersion project. "As a result, Maori [Elders] and leaders went back to their respective communities, families and tribal groups and began to develop what has become known as the Te Kohanga Reo initiative: to take preschool children into total immersion Maori language nurseries; to surround them with 'nannies' and [Elders] who were fluent speakers of Maori language" (Smith, 2000, p.63). With the financial support and encouragement of the Department of Maori affairs, the Maori 'language nest' projects expanded from four experimental centers in 1982 to 280 in 1984 to 500 in 1987.

The Maori early immersion language programs now have expanded the cultural content of language immersion to include valuable community-based principles. These principles are an important bi-product of Maori language and cultural retention projects. The Maori are a prime example of the concept that language and culture cannot be separated from each other or from the community being served. The Maori language immersion experience confronted many challenges similar to the other Aboriginal language models discussed earlier. The lack of qualified fluent teachers is often offset by the inclusion of Maori language assistants and nannies.

The Te Kohanga Reo immersion programs were directed at preschool aged children and supported by bilingual instruction in the schools. Today maintenance of the Maori language is facing difficulties in their attempt to provide continuity for the cultural and language base given to their children in the locally run language nests. Out of a large population of Maori students who attend compulsory primary and middle schools almost one third of these children participate in immersion or bilingual or language studies. A 1998 study by the Te Puni Kokiri for the Ministry of Maori Development reported that the 30% of all Maori students who attending primary school and middle schools participated in either a bilingual program or immersion education. Only 7% of Māori in primary schools were in immersion settings and only 13% of composite middle schools were in immersion settings in 1998. By the time a Maori student reaches secondary

schooling the immersion participation has dropped to 1% of all Maori students and only 8% in bilingual programs. From these statistics it appears that over the years, without community support, there is a steady decrease of Maori attendance in immersion and bilingual programs. The Maori people continue to battle the practice of the schools to emphasize English and receive only nominal governmental support for their language maintenance beyond the preschool level. While Maori continue to resist ongoing pressure to conform to an outside culture, their strength and resiliency has become an internationally recognized model for success.

In all these programs with the commitment of Aboriginal leaders and the support of experts, dominant societal barriers only served to reinforce local unity and tribal political will. Some of the common barriers confronting the language and culture revitalization included systemic blocks, a lack of funding, a lack of curriculum materials and a lack of qualified teachers. "For the Maori the history of colonization has been extremely painful: not only has it caused loss and change of culture, but it has also brought about systemic cultural denigration and undermined the validity and legitimacy of Maori knowledge and culture" (Smith, 2000, p.59). The Cree, Hualapai, Maori and Hawaiian share a similar history of impending language loss and cultural breakdown. These wonderful legacies of determination and Aboriginal spirit share one common theme that carried these people, who fought to save their culture and language and that theme is their collective response to their Elders' words. These immersion models, their successes and their struggles serve to remind me that only when the collective spirit is moved and when we collectively strive to achieve the vision of cultural and language revitalization anything is possible.

# CHAPTER THREE: SELECTING ETHNOGRAPHIC RESEARCH

As long as the research method honors the Aboriginal worldview and considers Indigenous research as a methodology the researcher can facilitate culturally sensitive data collection. This does not mean that western methods cannot be used. It does mean, however, honour, respect and the heart one puts into the observation of people and their lives is paramount. In my opinion, the ethnographic approach to research is compatible with Aboriginal education research because it captures the complexity and wholistic significance of my people's language and culture. Because ethnographic methodology is comprised of a cultural, behavioral and interpretive search, this style of research adapts easily to an Aboriginal insider data collection. I applied this culturally sensitive technique of research to address the question: Can a community restore its language once it is considered to be in jeopardy of being lost and if so, how can this be achieved? To answer this question my observations and interviews focused on the identification of language transmitters (Elders) and key language revitalization factors such as kinship, education and immersion. These factors plus societies political will, community cohesion and the support of mainstream education policy assist the restoration of a threatened language.

## Applying Ethnographic Research

James P. Spradley, in his book titled 'Participant Observation', guides the student of ethnographic research through a step-by-step procedure designed to facilitate a well-orchestrated project. To set the stage for his systematic approach, Spradley discusses the importance of recognizing the purpose and principles required to maintain ethnographic research integrity. Although this chapter will focus on Spradley's techniques, recommendations and viewpoints, there will also be references to other recognized author's in the field of ethnography.

Spradley's definition of participant observation clearly emphasizes this is one method of fieldwork in ethnographic research. "Ethnographers" states Spradley, "do not merely make observations, they also participate. Participation allows [one] to experience

activities directly, to get the feel of what events are like" (Spradley, 1980, p.51). He believes it is very necessary to have a well-developed procedural plan and even though participant observation as a research style is cyclical, understanding the steps will ensure the researcher develops a sense of order and understanding the cycle will aid the researcher in the continuous re-evaluation of direction. Spradley's steps therefore provide a template for orderly, yet open-minded ethnographic research. Other authors generally support Spradley. Danny L. Jorgensen defines participant observation as the [direct] involvement in the here and now of people's daily lives [to provide] a reference for the logic and process of participant observational inquiry and a strategy for gaining access to phenomena that commonly are obscured from the standpoint of a non-participant" (Jorgensen, 1989, p.91).

Martyn Hammersley and Paul Atkinson, in the book 'Ethnography' refer to participant observation as the intrinsic role that we play as human beings involved in our daily, cultural and social lives. "All social research is founded on the human capacity for participant observation and [by] including our own role within the research focus, and perhaps even systematically exploiting our participation in the settings under study as researchers, we can produce accounts of the social world...."(Hammersley and Atkinson, 1995, p.21-2). David Fetterman asserts, "[participant] observation characterizes most ethnographic research and is crucial to effective fieldwork". He further expands on the concept by stating that "[participant] observation combines participation in the lives of the people under study with maintenance of a profession distance that allows adequate observation and recording of data" (Fetterman, 1989, p.45). Denzin states, "[participant] observation is a data collection strategy that combines direct participation with informants and careful observation of their behaviors with introspective reflection on the possible meaning of their activities" (Denzin, 1978, p.186).

While scholars distinguish ethnography and participant observation in many ways, it becomes obvious that participant observation is not easily separated from ethnographic research. In general, authors are in agreement that the level of participation, the quality of observation and the delicate balance of these two attributes are the strongest

determinants of quality participation observation research. H. Russel Benard in Social Research Methods (2000) states:

> There are five reasons for insisting on participant observation in the conduct of scientific research about cultural groups:
>
> First, participant observation makes it possible to collect different kinds of data.
>
> Second, participant observation reduces the problem of reactivity, of people changing their behavior when they know that they are being studied.
>
> Third, participant observation helps you formulate sensible questions in the native language.
>
> Fourth, participant observation gives you an intuitive understanding of what's going on in a culture and allows you to speak with confidence about the meaning of data.
>
> Fifth, many research problems simply cannot be addressed adequately by anything except participant observation (p.324 - 326).

Spradley describes the ordinary (insider) participant, in contrast with the participant observer, as a person who "has one purpose and that is to participate in activity/activities without describing, analyzing, or writing up the activity. ...Ordinary participants are observers and while they use their perceptual skills to gather information, they limit observing and listening to their immediate goal of accomplishing some tasks."(p.57) The participant observer appears to be ordinary but this individual has a secondary intention. Their first intention is to "engage in activities appropriate to the situation" and their second intention is to formally "observe the activities, people, and physical aspects of the situations" (Spradley, 1980, p.54).

Direct observation is distinguished from participant observation because the observer does not wish to become a participant, is as unobtrusive as possible, is more detached and tends to be more focused. Indirect observation technology can be very helpful. The

difference between the researcher participant and the researcher observer is the objective and intention. The observer merely makes a mental or written record of the situation and events, while the participant experiences as much of the activity or situation with all the senses. The participant observer must record participant level observations while observing as much of the surrounding situation at the same time. This is achieved with a methodical yet responsive approach to the research situation and informants.

Spradley describes five types of participation and three types of observation. The three types of observation are descriptive observation, focused observation and selective observation. Descriptive observation attempts to record as much information as possible. The place, people, activity, surrounding objects, time, purpose and mood of the social situation are all considered in the recording of this data. A focused observation attempts to target a subgroup or subactivity. (for example, the observation of youth dancers at the Pow Wow.) Selective observation will narrow the focus further to recognize one or a few individual's reactions in a certain situation.

By classifying the level of participation the researcher can develop planned approaches to situations. Classification by characteristics and level of involvement is one method of organizing research participants. This is a method recommended by Spradley and his categories based upon the following guidelines.

> The characteristic of a non-participant is - no involvement with the people or activities studied. Observation is the only method used in the collections of data.
>
> The characteristic of passive participation is - presence at the scene but does not interact or participate with other people.
>
> The characteristic of a moderate participant is -maintaining balance between insider and an outsider, observation and participation.
>
> The characteristic of active participant initially starts by observation. She/he does what other people do to gain acceptance and to learn more of the cultural rules of behavior and tries to learn the same behavior.
>
> The characteristic of complete participation is the highest level of involvement and it is complete involvement. By using this technique one will attempt to know

> and to understand at a deeper level, the cultural knowledge. (Spradley, 1980, p.59-62)

This orderly approach, recommended by Spradley, simplifies what may initially be viewed as complex widespread research into an organized calculated project. Selecting the research purpose and the ideal research situation are also crucial decisions that determine decisions and identifications of the many possible components. Questions concerning the application of various research strategies, the relevance of the selected participants and the length of research must be addressed. To aid the researcher Spradley's systematic approach qualifies the best selections and organizes the levels of decisions into twelve steps. Seven of these valuable steps are broken down as follows:

- Locating a Social Situation
- Doing Participant Observation
- Making an Ethnographic Record
- Making Descriptive, Focused and Selective Observations
- Making Cultural, Domain Analysis and Categorizing
- Cultural Themes and Inventory
- Writing the Ethnographic Report

**Collecting Participant Observation Data**

Harry F. Wolcott divides participant observation activities into actions of experiencing, enquiring and examining. For Wolcott, "[experiencing] includes, of course, information that comes directly through all the senses." (Wolcott, 1999, p.46). Enquiring entails various styles of interviewing and examining refers to the research of apparel, art, personal information and archival materials. Under these three categories he then divides research activities into subcategories with strong focus under the category of enquiring or interviewing. Interviewing is a wide, complex area and Wolcott assists the ethnographer's ability to determine the best method by categorizing the many styles of questioning as follows:

- Casual conversation – an important source of information
- Life history, life cycle interview – examines events that mark stages of life.
- Key participant interviews – relying on a few or a single participant identified is representative of the research objective.
- Semi-structured interview – open-ended and evolving.

- Structured interview – "each interviewee is asked the same questions in the same way."(Wolcott, 1999, p.53)
- Survey – formal presentation with a larger target group.
- Household census, ethno genealogy – tracing family history.
- Projective techniques – 'standardized' on other populations. Questions ask to predict the future, and
- Other measurement techniques – anything that measures and elicits information, i.e. IQ testing.

**Making Observations**

There are differing styles and techniques of observational research. "All observers have to gain access to the subjects" (Sapsford and Jupp, 1996, p.93). Ethnography is considered an unstructured observational research although structured observation is applicable in certain situations. The observation techniques pose ethical and validity questions such as deception, invasion of privacy and reliability of the information. It is important to remain detached and to record findings related to observation. Body language, group dynamics and patterns of behavior are often key sources, which stimulate further observation or require attention for the final analysis.

**Recording and Coding**

Prior to the initiation of a participation observation research project, the thnographer's impressions, observations and reasons for how the selection was made are recorded. Written field notes are a major part of any ethnographic record. Spradley suggests three principles address the problem of what language is best used in the recording process. This coding or language will identify and provide consistent formats such as the brackets or quotations to identify a speaker. Whether the 'native' language will be captured verbatim and how these instances will be noted and the final principle refers to special attention of detail are early decisions that organize records in a orderly manner. "In practice, coding can be thought of as a range of approaches that aid the organization, retrieval, and interpretation of data." (Fetterman, 1989, p.27).

Coding, although evolving in nature, is designed with the purpose of referencing key elements in the records. These elements are broken into categories and subcategories. For example: the fluency level of interviewed Cree speakers and their position in the

community or family as a subcategory (i.e. Elder, youth, student). Other coding techniques include highlighting the relevance of the information and the research technique that was used. This enables the researchers to quickly reference specific instances, persons and situations during the analysis and preparation of the ethnographer's report.

**Field Notes**

Daily journals, questionnaires and descriptive observation notes are gathered on a continuous basis. These form the foundation for the final report. The entries should be dated and any information that facilitates the complete recall of events, relevant instances; unspoken reactions and overall atmosphere are added to expand the condensed form. During the gathering of information a consistent series of abbreviations and coding methods ensure important information is recorded in an accessible manner.

Fetterman recommends the researcher utilize an observation form that allows the observer to record observations within the various categorizations. This form preferably would allow room to document moods, behaviors, setting information and the various classifications such as relevance of participants, research methods use etc. He states, "A number of techniques can stimulate the interviewer's recall and organize data" (Spradley, 1980, p.63). Spradley agrees when he states, "Even though every ethnographer develops his or her system of organization of his or her field notebook and there exists several kinds of field notes that makeup ethnographic records, field notes should reflect the actual field situation. There is a link between the ethnographic record and the final written one"(Spradley, 1980, p.69-70). The final report may be months or years after the initial research. Organized notes and detailed records will greatly assist the analysis of findings. This is all achieved by advanced planning. In the research for this report I prepared a note taking form that assisted in my research recording. (Appendix 4)

**Analysis and Interpretation**

Data gathered from the descriptive observations, interviews and questionnaires are analyzed to include facts, insights and reflections of the participant observer. During this process generalizations, cultural meanings, and insider interpretations are noted. The

cultural component of participant observation research includes the recognition of behavioral patterns, artifacts and knowledge. "Culture is an organization of things, the meaning given by people to objects, places, and activities" (Spradley, 1980, p.86). These observations are intrinsic and often surface under review and analysis of field notes. To assist the recognition of culturally relevant data the analysis of the information is reviewed and further coded to identify cultural domains. "A cultural domain is a category of cultural meaning that includes other smaller categorie."(Spradley, 1980, p.86). By coding with a structure that emphasizes cultural observations the final analysis will expose cultural meanings that are not obvious to the ordinary participant or the outsider observer.

**Leaving the Field**

Predominant authors agree that leaving the field is an emotional and difficult experience for participant observation ethnographers. Relationships are formed, bonds are established and attachments become difficult to sever. Danny L. Jorgensen states, "Leaving the field is an emotional experience. Length and degree of participant involvement intensifies these feelings. Your experience in departing the field commonly will range from joy and relief to regret and even sadness" (Jorgensen, 1989, p.118-19). Berg notes that

> [exiting] any field setting involves at least two separate operations; first, the physical removal of the researcher from the research setting and second the emotional disengagement from the relationships developed during the field experience. Even when the emotions of field relationships are mentioned, they frequently are described exclusively as concern over the perspective of the inhabitant of the natural setting. Towards this end, researchers must prepare both the community members and themselves for the exit. (Berg, 1998, p.153)

In the Aboriginal epistemology leaving the field never really occurs if the researcher is an insider. The research may arrive at a final report but an insider recognizes and understands that because of the cyclical evolving nature of

Aboriginal communities, the connections that are made, the relationships that are reinforced and kinship ties are never severed.

### Balancing the Aboriginal Worldview and Ethnography

In keeping with my own Aboriginal worldview I employed the teachings of my Elders, which includes the principle of reciprocity, the maintenance of a balanced and a healthy rapport with the community members, and I always attempted to carry an attitude of gratitude. During my immersion research and my interview processes I delivered offerings and gifts in both communities. This protocol was carried out on a face-to-face basis with humility and honor in appreciation for the participant's contribution when they shared their experiences and knowledge. At the beginning of my University life I consulted my Elders seeking their support and direction. An ongoing relationship with my family and Elders continued before, during and after this participant observation project. I consulted with kin and Elders during informal conversations and while attending formal counseling sessions. I valued the support of my family and the approval of my Elders so I continuously sought their wisdom and guidance. Researching in Aboriginal communities requires sincerity, quality work and commitment but it also remains primary to me that the respect for the language and culture must be adhered to. In my research I held this respect as my central policy and any method or procedure implemented during my research had to adhere to my respect for culture. For example, I did not take notes if the situation required traditional listening behavior or if the activity interfered with expected behavior even though the note taking would have been advantageous to my research report. In these cases I relied on my oral and traditional listening skills rather than the strict adherence to ethnographic research methodologies. In this way I adapted ethnography to my background and culture.

### Participation Observation in Two Aboriginal Communities

I visited two Aboriginal communities (Nipisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk) with the goal of identifying key educational issues relating to language and culture. By alternating full participation, observation and various interview methods I ensured that I was able to respond to each situation and balance my levels of detachment or involvement.

Strategies included informal interviews, full participation and observation. Under the umbrella of ethnography, I adapted various methods as a response to the uniqueness of each situation and each community. Ultimately, the goal of utilizing this approach as a participant observer enabled me to grasp the insider point of view in a meaningful way.

In Asiniy Askihk, I eliminated formal research methods that would interrupt my becoming totally immersed in the project. I did what other people from the community did in order to gain acceptance. I responded naturally to many implicit cultural rules of behavior. My presentation of the research findings are founded in the methodology that stresses Indigenous Research is a community-based and culturally relevant process requiring full immersion. This approach is also very compatible with Spradley's classifications of active and complete participation. Some written and taped personal reflections, field notes and photographic opportunities complimented my excursion.

In contrast, Nipisiy Askihk is familiar territory. Therefore, to maintain some level of objectivity I focused on interviewing and observation. The reason for this was to draw out culturally relevant information and to emphasize detachment to prevent as much personal bias as possible. I informally questioned the interviewees with a loosely adhered to outline of open-ended questions which were prepared in advance. Although I am a recognized community member, my lengthy residency in the city to attend University necessitated the re-establishment of rapport to strengthen trust. From my past experiences I was fully aware that community members are suspicious of the intention of the mainstream educational process. We have all witnessed how immersion in a cultural setting foreign to the Aboriginal culture can often alter the worldview of many community members. Many community members, after traveling to gain an education in the mainstream, return to their communities with incompatible beliefs and values. The community sees this loss in the person and they often say, *moniyaw îtîm'sohtwaw,* which means 'now they think they are white'. This is viewed as a loss for the whole community because the culture and language disappears as each member becomes less and less oriented in the Aboriginal worldview. I maintained my community ties through regular visits and continuous consultations with my family and my Elders. I have kept my

fluency in the Cree language. I believe my ability to speak the language and to understand the implicit meanings in our ceremonies and unspoken gestures enhanced my position as an insider researcher.

In order to accurately record information the results of the interviews were taped and many observations were recalled in retrospective notes. Field notes and personal reflections included consideration of casual conversation as a moderate participant in the community. I followed Spradley's description of the moderate participant to remind myself that I must balance the insider and outsider roles carefully. My juggling of these three classifications from active, to complete and to moderate were necessary because of the different dynamics in each community.

There were many conditions such as my personal worldview and my position as an insider or outsider researcher that influenced my choices of participants and my methods of recording. As a Cree speaking Aboriginal woman my observations and perceptions were enhanced with interpretations of implicit meanings and unspoken communications that are difficult to translate across Cree and English. An outsider to the Cree culture may not have seen the same behaviors or drawn the same conclusions as I did because of my background and conditioned reactions to others who follow the same codes of behavior. Two significant influencers bias my review of language loss, retention and revitalization:

- A high respect for my Elders, whom I consider keepers of the culture, and the traditional Aboriginal worldview, and
- My certification as a Cree Language teaching, in conjunction with my practical experience as a teacher of the Cree language in the mainstream school system.

There were many things to consider preparing for and conducting this research. Each community was challenging and unique. Before entering Nîpisiy Askihk's I understood the community was challenged with a political environment that was fragile at the time. Nipisiy Askihk is currently in the early stages of self-determination. Discussion concerning their future direction and organization as an autonomous self-governing unit

are beginning to evolve but there does not seem to be a clear vision or a unified position. Asiniy Askihk on the other hand had already united and established to the point where they are capable of hosting outsiders who wish to study their approaches to language and culture maintenance.

**Nîpisiy Askihk Research Considerations**

In Nipisiy Askihk casual conversation substantiated many comments made during taped, loosely structured formal interviews. Many discussions during my travels focused on the loss of respect for each other and the loss of kinship beliefs. Comments varied but the tone remained consistent. I overheard people speaking of internal quarrelling - that this all would be unnecessary if we remembered our ways.

Many Aboriginal researchers are caught in the dilemma of balancing close family connections and unspoken kinship codes. This situation of family and kinship was obvious to me every minute of the visit. In this research many intuitive moments occurred. These moments of internal knowing or *îmoyîtamân* happen as reactions to an understanding of the culture and were so subconscious that I just knew when to withdraw or when to change my behavior accordingly. A consideration, weighing heavily on my mind, was my being privy to insider conversations and my having a historical understanding of the community dynamics. Right from the beginning I became very aware of the challenge to balance the insider role and the observer role. Because of the dynamics of impending political protests and my determination to remain neutral, I found it extremely difficult to fully participate so I chose to rely on isolated interviews and low profile observations while attempting to maintain my objectivity.

An internal unrest had been brewing for some time in Nipisiy Askihk . A formal protest began two days after my interviews were completed. The night before the protest, three teepees were set up and these were used for the protesters' closed meetings. After the majority of protesting people arrived, the leaders of this group brought their supporters together in a circle to pray. Emotions were high on both sides and I focused my time and

energy toward observations to remain detached from either side. This was difficult because the political tension was always looming.

The protesters began their march before my departure. During my observation of the march I wondered whether this was how our people historically settled their disputes. The protest march started towards the band administration office. Amongst the protestors one member walked and drummed. I was uncomfortable with the use of the drum, due to its sacredness; again I would question myself concerning my peoples' traditional ways. There was talk among non-protesting band members that the drum did not belong there in an adversary situation. The drum is sacred to our people as a symbolic representation of our hearts beating as one. The use of this symbol to signify division rather than oneness disturbed many community members. It carried with it a warning that some members were so unhappy that they would use sacred methods to upset our kinship and harmony. Later my consultation with a respected Elder confirmed these sentiments.

The protestors were chanting and the signs read, *"No Accountability," "It's Time To Listen To Our People," "Fairness and Justice." "Forensic Audit, Clear The Air", "Equal Information, Equal Opportunity," "Our Children's Future Being Spent Foolishly On Legal Fees"*. In actual fact a power struggle was going on that only an insider would fully understand. In this environment of feuding and political unrest my participants were chosen carefully and I gathered field notes as discreetly as possible. I detected emotions of fear, anxiety and anger throughout the visit. The interviewees were distracted and uncomfortable during our interviews. This pressure and the restriction of time prevented me from collecting more than five semi-formal interviews. My collection of other data relied on participation activities with friends and family, casual conversations with liaison workers, parents and observation of children in the community.

**Asiniy Askihk Research Considerations**

Before I embarked on my trip to this area in Canada that I had never visited before I felt much apprehension and mixed emotions. Immersion so far from home was difficult to comprehend. I was excited, enthusiastic and yet I was determined to face this challenge.

My background as a Cree, woman, reared on wild foods and instructed in the traditional codes of behavior contributed greatly to my ability to quickly orient myself to another Cree location. Although, I was new to this geographic area and the land was unfamiliar, almost immediately in this immersion experience I felt a spiritual belonging to the people. I was an outsider by tribe, by geographical roots and by bloodline yet in Asiniy Askihk, a common Aboriginal interconnectedness easily pulled me in. I related as if I had found another home and another family where I could relax and conduct myself without guardedness. This sensation of familiarity and belonging had a very strong influence on my approach to the Asiniy Askihk immersion team and the selection of my research methods.

Although this project was limited to a two-week duration I gathered a wealth of information from participating, observing and capturing photographic moments. This time constrain restricted the research teams' opportunity to experience further exposure beyond the camp hosts in the camp setting. This situation was very much a controlled experience. Although this immersion camp was well coordinated and structured to ensure we experienced many culturally relevant activities, the researchers did not have the time or opportunity to wander into other areas to observe community life (i.e. the schools, the family home environments, the band administration office). I regretted this lack of exposure to the rest of the community as I felt I would have benefited so much more from further investigation into their school programs and yearned for personal recollections of their history while they went through the process of designing the immersion programs to retain their Cree language and culture. On the surface children, educators, parents, political leaders and Elders worked in unison to retain their culture and language. The time restrain prevented me from confirming this assumption. The quick guided tours on the last day only served to pose many questions.

In the early days at the camp, I adopted a family and they adopted me. This tradition adoption practice is common among the Cree and the newly formed kinship connections remain strong if they are respected and nurtured. The comfort level between the immersion camp team and the researcher group was complemented and enhanced by a

strong relationship that demonstrated itself in unspoken honour bestowed on our professor by the camp Elders. It became obvious that our accompanying professor was also considered a highly revered Elder in this traditional camp environment. The immersion camp Elders made reference to him in Cree, '*Naha kiseyino*', which literally means 'that old man' and implicit in this statement is the understanding that he is a culturally recognized keeper of knowledge and wisdom. This comment carried with it an endearing tone that signified their respect for him. The traditional camp coordinators and Elders handled the diverse combination of differing backgrounds and our many approaches to research very calmly and pleasantly. When I considered the many walks of life that attended this camp I realized the constraints of time, physical confinement and the complexities of the research team were offset by the Elders hospitality, patience and respect. The camp team was very obliging, accommodating and the camp hosts accepted questioning, note taking and photography graciously.

**The Cohort Group**

Participation and observation at the immersion camp was impacted by the fact that a group of ten student researchers and a professor traveled together. Because we were operating as a group and yet documenting individual observations the research atmosphere overlapped into each individual's experience. While observing the camp hosts and the community culture, I was also aware of the activities of other researchers. This was sometimes insightful and sometimes distracting. For example, if someone else began writing their notes or if someone else conducted a formal interview I questioned my own procedures and wondered if I should be doing the same thing. Each of my decisions was balanced against the relationship between myself and my goals, my university education, my culture and my personal perception of the immersion camp.

An ethnographic researcher is often afforded the opportunity to totally immerse because this type of research encourages the researcher to participate at a level where the individual researcher's feelings and experiences are as important as the interviewees and observed. Each individual in the cohort group brought their own worldview or interpretation of the Aboriginal worldview. The individual always screens or selects

moments of relevance according to their particular interests, motives or moments of connection. In this instance the members of the cohort group displayed many traits, values and beliefs in their individual approaches to research. Some were heavily relying on written notes, some were concentrating on formal interviews and some utilized this time to consult with each other.

Even though we all came from the same area of the country there was much diversity in our group. Within the Aboriginal culture each of us develop unique personalities. It is important to understand that any lumping of our characteristics under one umbrella is stereotyping of Aboriginal people. The research cohort group served to prove that each of us develops in our own direction and we cannot be labeled as having the same traits even though we come from similar backgrounds. The camp hosts and the cohort group differed in their approaches and this served to emphasize for me how unique we all are within our common heritage.

These varieties of values and reactions to the surrounding community created dynamics that made my experience more involved. I was able to observe not only the Aboriginal immersion camp but also the effect of this experience on some of the members in our team. For example, I felt a pressure to conform to University expectations, subgroup dynamics and mainstream culture all at the same time. When the opportunity arose for note taking I juggled these influences and yet I also felt a pressure to conform to our cultural oral traditions. How could I do both? My traditional base overrode and I relied heavily on oral traditions that required attentive listening and observation skills. My notes were written as a recollection of the day's experiences while I was alone in my tent.

# CHAPTER FOUR: DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS OF NIPISIY ASKIHK AND ASINIY ASKIHK

In both Asiniy Askihk and Nipisiy Askihk there were geographical land formations that unified pockets of related members and separated others; there were close knit family units and kinship ties that required reinforcement and there were opportunities to re-establish ties at community gatherings of political or social content. Participant observation in each community was directly affected by these group situations. Most authors agree that selecting the topic or theoretical framework of the research is closely connected to the selection of the situation. After all, one is not exclusive of the other. "All participant observation takes place in social situations" (Spradley,1980, p. 39). Spradley classifies the situation as having "three primary elements: a place; actors; and, activities or events. These social situations then can be categorized in three ways: clusters, networks, and social situations with similar activities. Clusters of social situations are linked by physical proximity" (Spradley, 1980, p.42). Networks of social situations as discussed by Spradley as the situation "where the same group of people share in the activities that we are interested in"(Spradley, 1980, p.42). All of these considerations influenced my participation, my selection of interviewees and my access to participants. The following discussion of each community will lead with a description of the background and setting and gradually delve into my analysis and findings from this ethnographic styled research project. The first community to be discussed is Nipisy Askihk and the subsequent discussion of Asiniy Askihk will follow in the same order.

## Nipisiy Askihk Background and Setting

It is in this community that my research began. Surrounded by lakes and boreal forest, Nipisiy Askihk is a Cree First Nation located in northwestern Canada. Out of a population of nearly 2000 people, approximately 25% of the membership currently resides on the reserve. Although a few members live in other provinces, the majority of off-reserve membership is generally concentrated in the surrounding towns or in one of the two main larger communities within two to four hours road travel. There are Metis settlements nearby where Nipisiy Askihk members have family ties.

Twenty-five minutes of road travel to the closest community connects Nipisiy Askihk with services and mainstream programs such as schools, medical services, government programs and grocery stores. This town hosts a population of approximately three thousand people and is a central hub of activity for many northern communities. School aged children commute daily by school bus to this multi-cultural centre to attend their parent's choice of either the Catholic or public school. There is no Aboriginal school in the area and this travel outside of their home community occurs from kindergarten through to grade 12. (For a short period in the 1970s an attempt was made to locally educate children from kindergarten to grade three in Nipisiy Askihk but this failed because the community was unprepared for the challenges ahead.) Past generations traveled from Nipisiy Askihk to the mission school and then, in later years, to the nearest community for provincial education. Today, road travel to and from central towns and cities, for basic services has become the normal routine for many Aboriginal families in this northwestern Canadian territory.

When I first arrived in Nipisiy Askihk, I delayed my research activities and spent some quiet time familiarizing myself with this environment. In this way I hoped to re-establish a sense of connection. All my background as a community member flooded back as I drove up and down the graveled, washboard back roads. I was home, and as I observed many physical changes I reminisced how the community changed from my childhood recollections. Suddenly, there were houses in areas that previously were unpopulated. More houses and an ever-increasing population had now created what seemed to be a miniature town on the reserve. In place of the small, scattered buildings from my youth, the local administration had now constructed a larger, modern central building. This modern building currently houses Chief and counselor's offices complete with computers, health care facilities and additional offices for the various onsite services such as road maintenance, housing and waste disposal. The old band hall, years ago, stood alone and was a simple lumber building that the community used for everything. It was the only building where the local people gathered for dances, ceremonies, meetings, wakes, weddings etc. Symbolically, I noticed an old house that had been moved to a more central location during the 1970's to accommodate the community school project now sits

empty. That emptiness represented an educational gap yet to be filled. The old health center is now the office for a Head Start program. In addition to these changes I noted that the community now had its own water treatment plant, a heritage house dedicated to local treaty history, community vehicles for Elders and medical transportation, and many modern services such as natural gas, running water and electricity. They had progressed profoundly from my childhood yet unfortunately the old family feuds and power struggles had not changed.

Coincidently the opportunity to reconnect with my family heritage occurred just before I began my research. During a visit with relatives I participated in a ceremony at my grandmother's grave. Although this ceremony reminded me of my ancestral belonging in this territory, I felt a sense of detachment from many of the other community members due to my years of off reserve residency and a mainstream education, which had pulled me physically away from my childhood home. Although my grandmother was a very traditional woman and a fluent Cree speaker she had been classified as Metis by the government and this historically distinguished us because there were those who separated the Metis and the Cree. As a result, even though my grandfather held the position of Chief for many years, some community members viewed our family as outsiders. During my marriage and during my university education I had spent less and less time in this community. I was fully aware of the community's discomfort concerning how people changed when they leave and this in conjunction with my history in the community brought about feeling of concern. Academically speaking I was an insider, yet emotionally and socially I felt like an outsider.

## Nipisiy Askihk Research Findings

Previous to my arrival family members warned of dissention in the community. It was brought to my attention that it might not be appropriate to conduct my research until tensions lessened. Since five interviews were scheduled to include two Elders, the Chief, the Education Director and the Education Director's Assistant I chose to continue with my research as open as possible. This became more complicated because an air of tension created suspicion amongst band members and any research activity could have

been construed to be unscrupulous. Out of respect for the Elders, I conducted the interviews in the Elders' homes. Other interviews were held in the band office to prevent any further suspicions about my activities. All along the way, it was necessary for me to confirm my intentions and that consent forms had been prepared previously. There may have been misconstrued connections made between my visit and the protesting.

Each interview lasted for a range of one to two hours in time. Responses to open-ended questions and open discussions were taped. Before the tape recorder was introduced into the conversation I re-established my research purpose, my community connections and kinship to bring about a sense of rapport and encourage relaxation under stressful conditions. Due to the tensions of a pending protest the ideal comfort level was difficult to maintain, especially with the interviewees working in the band administration building. Constant pen clicking, very stiff formal body language, distracted eye movements and serious voice intonations frequently demonstrated the interviewee's nervousness. A male Elder was stern and determined to express his frustration with the historical struggles he had witnessed. The female Elder was dressed formal and she seemed uncomfortable. Upon entering the room I could smell the scent of a traditional smudge and this comforted me. This indicated to me that I was in the presence of a woman who held many of the same beliefs I held. With each of the interviewees I relied heavily on the ethnographer's responsibility to possess personable qualities to elicit trust while maintaining the integrity of the project. "Working with informants is the hallmark of ethnographic field work…the ethnographer must locate helpful people, win their cooperation and establish a close personal relationship with them" (Spradley, McCurdy 1980, p.41). I established rapport by reminiscing family ties with them or discussing their children and their time spent in the community.

**Residential School Impact**

The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples profoundly expresses the devastating impact residential schooling had on Aboriginal people across Canada. At the heart of the vision of residential education – a vision of the school as home and sanctuary of motherly care – there was a dark contradiction, an inherent

element of savagery in the mechanics of civilizing the children. The very language in which the vision was couched revealed what would have to be the essentially violent nature of the school system in its assault on child and culture. The basic premise of re-socialization, of the great transformation from "savage" to "civilized", was violent. To kill the Indian in the child, the department aimed at severing the artery of culture that ran between generations and was the profound connection between parent and child sustaining family and community. In the end, at the point of final assimilation, "all the Indian there is in the race should be dead." This was more than a rhetorical flourish as it took on a traumatic reality in the life of each child separated from parents and community and isolated in a world hostile to identity, traditional belief and language. (RCAP, 1996, p.365)

The government policy of civilizing and assimilating worked in partnership with the churches and was so widespread that no Aboriginal community in Canada was left unscathed. By attacking children, the residential school adversely impacted family unity, cultural identity and destroyed language fluency in the upcoming generations. To achieve their vision of erasing the culture, Aboriginal children were bombarded with continuous, unjustified and often ruthless methods of discipline and indoctrination. The Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples, in section three, entitled "Discipline and Abuse", captures the atmosphere of the residential school in the following statement: "At school, they lived by a meticulous regimen of early rising, working, worshipping, learning and, finally, resting. Punishment for 'insubordination', for transgressing that regime and thus challenging the authority of the schoolmasters was pervasive and to some observers poisonous" (RCAP, 1996, p.366). One predominant influence, I recognized in my Nipisiy Askihk interviews, was the common thread of the interviewee's personal experiences with the residential school. Four out of five interviewees received the majority of their early education at the mission school located approximately 20 miles east of this community. Although I understood that the residential school assimilation process is commonly accepted as a culturally destructive force in Aboriginal history, three of the interviewees expressed the sentiment that the residential school was a positive experience. The Elders interviewed in Nipisiy Askihk expressed sadness

because attendance at these schools had nearly destroyed their language and culture, but they also believed this outside education facilitated a common Aboriginal vision to adapt and live in harmony with this new influence. Even though there was a dark side to the schooling methods the interviewees justified their parents choice to send them away as necessary. It was considered important to learn to get along with the "white man". They indicated adaptation to the English education would assist their survival in changing times. Basically, if the residential school process had offered the English language and the mainstream knowledge in a more culturally sensitive manner, the Elder's vision of living and prospering together would have been realized.

The two interviewed Elders lived for most of their early childhood, until they were 16 years old, at the mission school. One Elder stated, "I have nothing against the mission, I have no complaints because they taught me how to pray, how to talk English and how to work. What I didn't like was when they took away our native language and our religion." Implicitly, I understood this reference to religion to indicate the loss of our way of life and traditional teachings.

Early in the interviews, I asked the interviewees to explain their life in the community and where they went to school. It became more and more evident that most of them were schooled away from home, in the residential school system. One commented, "The mission did a lot of damage to our society but it also did a lot of good. I learned discipline. A lot of people would have gone hungry. Some things were not right but they didn't know any better." When I reviewed these responses, which suggested to me that the interviewees' have attempted to reconcile their educational experiences in their own minds, I realized that discipline I witnessed at home was much different in form and in intent than the discipline in the mission school.

The interviews also reminded me of my school experiences, which were certainly less traumatic than those of my ancestors. I had witnessed many students being physically reprimanded. Residential schools demanded strict work ethics and they offered relief to families struggling under the confines of reservation life and under the strife of the 1930

depression years. Physical work, adherence to tight schedules, punishments to re-enforce a work ethic and obedience was emphasized as key to teaching Aboriginal students how to be successful. The idea reinforced by the priests and the nuns was, if you do not work hard and obey then you will have nothing, and as a result you will be nothing.

Some interviewees' comments contrasted this notion that the residential school was a necessary survival tactic. One interviewee commented, "I counted from the time we got up until the time we went to bed, seventeen times a day we had to pray. Basically, that's all we did was pray. ...I wouldn't allow my kids to go to the residential school – there is nothing learned." Even though these sentiments of frustration with the schooling system surfaced frequently and the interviewees understood their greatest loss was language and culture, the majority stated the residential school experience was valuable. These conflicting statements illustrate an inner tension that pervades the history of these individuals and their community.

This tension began with loss of freedom to travel anywhere to hunt or fish and grew deeper during the residential school years. Adjustment to reservation life was complicated as it restricted movement and transferred authority to the Indian agent. Today these tensions have simply reshaped themselves into contemporary Aboriginal issues. This internal conflict is currently manifested as Aboriginal communities face the dilemmas of choosing between the mainstream measurements of success and the fear of completely loosing their traditional teachings. Nipisiy Askihk interviewees expressed sadness for the impact of the many adjustments they have made but defended past decisions to cooperate because compliance to mainstream became a method of survival.

These people remember difficult times with hunger and struggle, but I question where the hunger came from. The government control of the reservations limited the ability of people to fall back on their traditional land use knowledge during hard times and, then, apparently the residential schools offered education, clothing, food and shelter for their children. Gratitude for the feast, sharing with others and giving back are strong concepts

in the Aboriginal worldview. I believe a conflict remains in the minds of the interviewees because they expressed this gratitude for help in difficult times. However this acknowledgement that the nuns and priests 'didn't know any better' does not explain away the grief for their loss of language, culture and identity. Nor does it explain the religious discipline and their abusers' indignant attitude towards them and their children. Notably, to this day Nipisiy Askihk still accepts and cooperates with mainstream schooling.

This interpretation of these statements are supported by the following comments from the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples' summary of the Canadian Aboriginal residential school experience.

> In carrying out its responsibilities for Indian education, the federal government turned to the churches, which shared the government's goal of imparting Christian, European values. ...residential schools were used deliberately to break down the transmission of culture and language from one generation to the next. For nearly a century, parents and grandparents in reserve communities were legally compelled to turn their children over to the custody of residential school authorities. ....Hard labour and hunger were part of the experience of many children. (1996, RCAP p.433)

During the interviews both my interviewee and myself understood unspoken contents of the conversations that were implicit or hidden because we were both products of the mission and we knew what we were talking about. To bring insight into this research analysis it is necessary to explore not only the comments of my interviews but the memories these comments elicited in me. In retrospect, I can personally relate to the sentiments of my interviewees as I recall my grandparents and my mother's childhood stories. Growing up as a child I often heard reminiscing conversations about the mission school they attended. These stories contained sadness as they often told of feelings and anxieties while being in this environment far away from home. I remember their pain and the hurt in their voices and eyes. Yet as a child I begged my grandmother to allow me to go to school. When I asked her to please let me go to school to learn she stared, at

me silently, with a deep concern on her face. In retrospect I not only remember her disappointment to hear my pleas, I also remember my other siblings as their faces fell sullen and as they stared silently down at the ground. Although she encouraged schooling and learning, there was something else my family hoped to protect me from. Finally, under my constant begging, she begrudgingly consented and again everyone became silent.

The day I eagerly and blindly anticipated arrived. At a designated stop on the road, along with my siblings I was picked up and thrown into the back of a freight truck with the other children, like cattle. My illusion of a great learning experience was already being challenged with these adverse traveling conditions. Yet my enthusiasm persevered as we all quietly huddled in this poorly lit truck. In the darkness I remained true to my goal and hung onto every ounce of excitement. Every dark corner of the freight truck held a subdued, grim group of reserve children waiting to arrive at the mission. I rode to the mission and returned home in this manner until grade four when I received my first bus ride.

When we finally arrived at the school, the first thing they did was make our older siblings scrub us down because, as they told us, we were dirty and full of lice. The water was cold; we had to use scrub brushes and the soap made my skin red. I was so young and accepting but I wondered why I had to scrub so hard as we had just bathed at home before we came to school. Everywhere I looked there were long, gloomy faces. With my childish eyes I saw the nuns with their angry expressions. In my innocence and from traditional stories about planets and other life forms, I thought these strange beings with their unusual foreign words and unfamiliar uniforms must be aliens. I now understand these nuns had traveled from many far away places to work in these residential missions. Some of them didn't speak English or had very heavy accents. They spoke so many different languages that the experience must have been as tough on them as it was on us.

During the daily routine I sometimes became lonely for my brothers, I wondered where they were and worried that they may not be okay. I had not seen them and we were not

allowed to look for them. At recess time we were not allowed to go across a white line in the playground that separated the boys and the girls. I missed my brothers and worried about them so when I spotted my eldest brother I crossed the line and ran to him. This was a sin and I didn't understand the concept of sin. I only understood that at home I worked and played with my brothers. I was caught and punished. I had to knee in a corner for twenty minutes and think of my sin of disobedience. This was my first punishment, which doubled with each following offence. Many students spent a good part of these strictly structured days either laboring or contemplating their 'sins' on their knees.

The food was atrocious and distributed sparingly. Once we ran out of salt and the nuns substituted a coarse 'red' salt. They said, "This won't kill you Indians". Years later I went to buy salt for my brother's horses and he told me to pick up red salt. I recalled the red salt at school and in my horror realized back then we were fed ground up animal salt. Other times the food was very difficult to eat simply because it was repeatedly heated and served. We often were served the same meal for a week. To this day there are foods I cannot tolerate because they remind me of my school meals. Amazingly, in my childish disoriented state I still held onto my passion to learn. I still couldn't wait to get to the business of classroom instruction. I wanted to read and write.

This understanding that education is important to our people comes from my upbringing and I deeply relate to the inner conflict the Elder's related in the interviews. I too know the tension that separates Aboriginal people from their language and culture as they pursue further education. Even though I traveled from home at an early age to a strange world this experience has not inhibited my ability to care about other humans. The culture clash and the assimilation practices were unnecessary; the living conditions were difficult and the belief that Aboriginal people were inferior was wrong but the opportunity to learn and grow was important. This conflict and tension surfaced in my grandmother's concern for my well being, it prevailed in the interviewee's comments and it exists in myself today as I continue to study, learn and work under the structure of another society.

**The Cycle of Blame**

Although the Nipisiy Askihk band council recognizes recent attempts to incorporate Cree language instruction in programming in the nearby provincial school, the offering of Cree language as a second language option from grades three to twelve is generally viewed as simply not enough. For years the community has discussed the implementation of Cree language programming during the preschool and primary grades. These discussions are continuously met with resistance. A younger member identified this mainstream control of cultural content as part of a greater issue. He alluded to an overall lack of cultural content in the mainstream schooling and in his home. In this interview he blamed the schools for his difficult adjustment periods when he states, "They don't promote our cultural identity, they don't make us feel proud of who we are. They want to make us into little white men. They look down on natives. They know nothing about our spirituality. I had to find that on my own." Today in many of the schools where Aboriginal students attend, the practice of undermining the relevance of Aboriginal language and culture is evident in the lack of cultural understanding in the teachers, administration and program developers. Although the concept of culturally sensitive education is occurring at the academic level the process of initiating practical applications is very, very slow.

From my understanding of this community I know that his parents, like my own, were products of the residential school. His frustration with the lack of cultural content in his life and education permeated our discussion. "It was never given to me who I was. That part was left out. The language and culture, lodges and ceremonies that gave you strength and self-assertiveness were left out." This person blamed his cultural loss, his problems with drinking and his choice to hanging out with the wrong crowds on a lack of cultural identity at home and cultural sensitivity at school during his childhood development. These statements, from him exemplified how the current school systems continue to ignore the value of cultural identity in the empowerment of Aboriginal youth. His poignant comments also exemplified the intergenerational impact of the residential school assimilation policies

A high level of school absenteeism and a low level of completion by local youth are disturbing statistics in Nipisiy Askihk. Although it is agreed that the loss of language and culture has an adverse affect on the community, interviewees generally blamed the parents, the mainstream systems, the lack of political accountability, the governments and the students lack of self-discipline. One administrator stated, "Parents want the band council to make sure the kids get on the bus and go to school. ...The schools have too many options and the kids take the easiest classes." Again blame surfaces as an Elder accuses the governments for their lack of sensitivity to the student's financial dilemma. "The native children have all the opportunity but there is one factor hurting the children – it's the (post-secondary) allowance they are getting." He stressed that survival of the individual is more than culture and language survival; it is physical survival and a balance between these must be achieved. In essence this cycle of blame prevents any real action. The parents blame the politicians, the schools and the Elders. The Elders blame the parents and the community, the community blames the Elders and everyone blames the government. Sadly, the youth are surrounded with constant finger pointing. This challenge to restore their culture and revitalize their language has resulted in a cycle of blame that spins around pointing to First Nation administration, provincial and federal governments, schools, Elders and parents.

***The Elders***

From my experience as a Nipisiy Askihk insider I am familiar with the blame placed on our Elders for not reinforcing the cultural values and beliefs. This is a justification by many band members for their loss. They believe the Elders let them down in the past and are not taking a strong stance in the community. My research observation and participation in Nipisiy Askihk revealed many passing comments relating to the Elders lack of interest in cultural and language retention. Some members would say that Elders are responsible for the language loss in the community because they don't converse in Cree with their children and grandchildren; they opt to use English, as broken as it is. Even the Elders agreed with this and responded, *'tapwe ikwan'ma'* which means "that's very true."

This feeling of discouragement from the Elders and from others concerning their diminishing role in the community was later confirmed in further interviews. In these interviews I began my conversations and questions in the Cree language. Even though I addressed them in Cree, these Elders and other fluent speakers answered in English and only occasionally used Cree to clarify. I believed that this combination of Cree and English indicated a preference for mainstream methods in formal settings. Even though these were loosely structured interviews and they occurred in the participant's home environment, the fact that formal appointments were made and that I came from the university suggested to participants that they would probably be quoted somewhere in the mainstream world. It was important to them to communicate and their answers were often repeated in both languages to ensure clarity. In Nipisiy Askihk it is very common to converse in both languages at the same time. The half English, half Cree speakers are continuously translating concepts from one worldview to the other.

Interviews were formal in the participants' perception no matter how informally I approached the discussion. Formal situations seemed to demand the English language and I knew the comfort level for our language use was missing. At the time of the interview, my intent was to encourage trust by using our first language but they always reverted back to English. In casual conversation when I was not in a formal situation, for example a chance encounter shopping, the total conversation would have been carried on in Cree. These English responses may have occurred out of respect for my education and to ensure their voices were heard and understood.

One Elder felt regret that she had not learned to speak better English. Of the three fluent speakers none carried the whole conversation in Cree even though the opportunity had presented itself. They spoke both languages as if translating back and forth. If the concept was traditional (i.e. referring to kinship) then the preferred language was Cree, if the concept was mainstream based (i.e. the schooling system) then the preferred conversational medium was English. I have observed that this reverting back and forth and in retrospect understand that this mixing of the two languages is common among many Aboriginal people today.

I suspect this adaptation of English in everyday life is very significant to the Elder's place in the cycle of blame. The Elders have accepted English as a survival tool for themselves and the future generations. This view is closely related to past exposure to English-speaking immersion pressures from the outside culture. Many situations in the past and today require command of the English language. In earlier times my grandfather was angry about this pressure. In meetings and in speeches he always spoke in Cree. He often said, "I am very proud to be an Indian and I don't have to speak a foreign language".

***The Schools***

In the Catholic School, serving Nipisiy Askihk, there are liaison workers and programs directed at cultural relevance. Aboriginal teachers, liaison workers and Cree language classes have been present for a number of years. In the Public School, Elementary, Junior High and Senior High, there is one Aboriginal liaison worker for each school. It is the role of the liaison worker to network and bridge between the Aboriginal community, families, teachers and students. This attempt to develop a culturally sensitive approach was not considered to be enough by the interviewed people in Nipisiy Askihk. One respondent described the situation as political and commented that in the schools, "Invisible barriers are being put up all the time." In this interview the schools are recognized as not understanding the conflict an Aboriginal student endures while attempting to balance two worldviews. He elaborated that the community and teachers need to "understand what [Aboriginal students] are going through." Cultural sensitivity and relevance in the classroom could be achieved if Aboriginal students were taught "the Indian history and the Indian philosophy of life" so they would grow to be "strong and proud as a people." Other participants blamed the schools for not properly addressing cultural sensitivity and "not making an effort to come into the community". The liaison workers were recognized as a commendable effort but there still exists frustration. This is best summarized in the following comment. "A lot of native students are smart, a lot of them smarter than whites but in a different white environment they don't excel."

***The Parents***

I found another common theme arose frequently during my observations and interviews. A parents' lack of involvement in their children's education surfaced as parental blame

during one interview. "I didn't have the support of my mother," who was a single parent. This same participant complained, today "parents are not involved and don't want to be involved." In response to this issue he thought the solution was to "re-educate the parents." An Elder substantiated the power of parental influence when he stated, "Kids learn a lot from the family, if arguing they learn that." Another participant drew the connection between the parents' role and schooling in a discussion of the students who have no family support. "When they gave out report cards, I used to feel sorry for those kids. Some of them, not even one family member came." Parental apathy is repeatedly alluded to and may require further research to substantiate. There are many remarks that indicate the parents are being blamed by the Elders, the local administrators and the schools.

The schools also communicated this frustration during my casual discussion with the liaison workers. From my personal experiences as a teacher and community worker I have continuously heard comments blaming parents for apparent lack of interest in their children's education. Further interviews revealed this tendency to blame the parents. One interview discussion referred to the band administrator's recollection of school meetings between the band council and the school representatives. From his experience he had witnessed many times where comments were made arguing that the parents were not participating at the level necessary to encourage education. A culture of fault and finger pointing has grown in the home, in the schools and in the political environment. In this blaming situation parents shoulder total responsibility for the education of their children yet these same parents are often powerless to change a system that undermines the Elders' role and the traditional teachings.

***The Government***

Although no interview questions were directed at the responsibility of governing bodies, the political unrest in the community created an atmosphere of government dissatisfaction and the topic was difficult to avoid. Conducting interviews in the midst of this unsettling environment seemed to provide the participants with the opportunity to express their political views. One participant adamantly voiced his loyalty to the existing

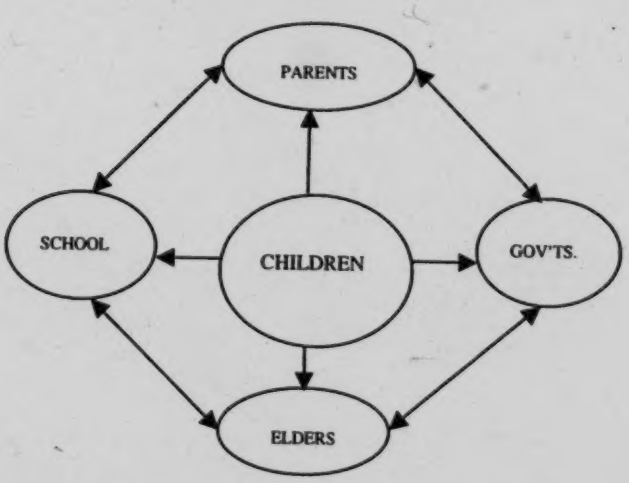
administration, "The Chief and Council have always supported education and never touched funds from education programs."

The perceived weakness of a school in a nearby community was often cited as a discouraging model for a locally run school. Band office personnel noted that, "a lot of people are looking at a neighboring school that is failing." An Elder elaborated on some of this school's problems: "No teachers will stay there, the (school) committee listens to the children and not the teachers and the kids just get up and walk out to go for a smoke." To the Nipisiy Askihk onlooker, this community built a large impressive building but seemingly is an example of unprofessional administration and poor accountability. For this reason and others, Nipisiy Askihk members fear an on reserve school will hurt their childrens' chances for a proper education, which will in turn affect their economic survival. A participant commented that this sentiment to prevent an on reserve school has been prevalent for a few years. Three local surveys resulted in rejection of the idea. In these surveys the reasons given were fears of culture shock, isolation and "local political interference in the school operations".

Some parents say that the Chief and Council do not take the time to pursue education initiatives and they seem to focus more energy on economic development projects. Questions arise in casual conversations concerning the band administration and the public school administration sensitivity to the general communities needs and desires. A strong blaming sentiment underlies pointed comments that indicate the decision makers do not make a strong enough effort to include the Elder's and the parents. The general membership expresses frustration with surveys and research that they were not included in. There is a sentiment that each level of government operates with a separate agenda, not informing each other and not including the community.

*These findings indicate a cycle of blame exist between the parents, schools, governing bodies and the Elders. This cycle of blame is a best summarized in the illustration below. Four key stakeholders in the education of Aboriginal youth recycle the responsibility for culturally relevant education and language preservation.*

**THE CYCLE OF BLAME**




A theme of 'finger pointing' and tension surfaced in my analysis of field notes, taped conversations and reflections. It became evident that blaming the administrative institutions, Elders or family situations, while sometimes rational, is not a solution. While this blame revolves around the circle: the children, the culture and the language are being ignored. When the responsibility lands on the parents or the teachers or the politicians the automatic response is to pass on. This passing on of responsibility is endless until community awareness exposes the pattern and someone in the circle takes the initiative. In consideration of the residential school assimilation experiences and the acculturation practices of the past it is obvious that no one individual can carry the responsibility of repairing, retaining or reviving language or cultural integrity. It will take a united effort. I found the fear of failure, fear of being blamed and fear of attack very disabling for all concerned.

The models for Aboriginal education initiatives provide us with strong examples of actions taken in other countries that promote cultural identity and language retention. In the Maori guideline for Boards of Trustees and Schools on Engaging with Maori Parents, Whanau, and Communities, the Secretary for Education, Howard Fancy states:

> Success in education is much more likely when schools, parents, and the wider community work well together. When this happens, the relationship is characterized by a strong respect and valuing of the identity, language, and culture that are important to the students and their families. It is characterized by a strong and genuine sense of partnership where the school, family and community can apply their collective skills, energies, and abilities to support, encourage, and enhance the learning of children (Fancy, 2001, p.4).

The root of this blaming cycle could be connected to many community members' early childhood education, and the traumatic assimilation methods they experienced. It is very symbolic of their life at the mission schools that the Elders felt it was necessary to juggle English and Cree to communicate. This was an indicator of how very difficult it is to mix two worldviews. Survival during times of depression and oppression subconsciously hold this community in a state of tension. In the past, survival relied upon adaptation to an outside culture and conformity to the larger society. The traditional worldview existed underground and became submerged underneath the dominant society. Today, as communities are becoming empowered to choose between traditional teachings methods and mainstream methods, individuals weigh the best solutions. When people are overwhelmed with a worldview that is incompatible with their own worldview, internal stress results in blaming and conflicting behavior. On the one hand individuals desire the return to traditional ways and on the other hand they fear that traditional ways may not sustain them in the mainstream. I understood this pressure, conflict and tension as a Cree person but my traditional culture and language has sustained me even in difficult times.

In my life my traditional teachings were reinforced at home. I came from a strong family who were adamant that language and culture would sustain my future. Even though I

was blessed with the Cree language and the concepts underlying our traditional values and beliefs many moments in the hierarchical, individualistic society have been difficult. These moments of tension required balancing and that balancing I find when I turn to my tradition teachings. My Cree language reinforces my worldview and communicates in-depth meanings. Those who have lost our language and our culture do not have this root. They are not anchored. Blame is a symptom of the pain and shock from being uprooted and disoriented. Without the foundation of the traditional worldview, with an incomplete comprehension of what it is to be Aboriginal in the contemporary world, the Elders, the parents, the teachers, the leaders and the children loose focus and purpose.

**Kinship is Unity**

References to kinship ties filtered into interviews and discussions about education issues and cultural loss. During the protest, observers and participants questioned the loss of a sense of community and repeatedly mumbled, "we're all related." One Elder commented in Cree, *'wahkohtowin ewanihtayahk'*, which translated means "we've lost our idea of how we are related." In this statement, she referred to traditional times when parallel cousins and cross cousins were expected to treat each other with respect as brothers and sisters. Nipisiy Askihk is composed of four families and in essence everyone is related. This confusion and feeling of loss surfaced again in an interview with another Elder. She quietly reflected in Cree, *'kakiyaw oma î wahkotoyahk'*, which translated means, "we are all related". Disunity and dissention stemming from cultural breakdown through residential school and systemic programming has left Nipisiy Askihk fragmented. Even though there is a surface acceptance of English and the mainstream schooling systems, the Elders and band members express a sense of loss and grieving for traditional beliefs and kinship based decision-making.

## Asiniy Askihk Background and Setting

The community of Asiniy Askihk provides its members with all the modern services. On their website they describe modern public facilities including schools (pre-school to adult education), daycare, clinic, arena and sports fields, post office, police and fire station, geological centre, radio station, public and private housing, and a community

administrative office. Their community also hosts regional Cree organizations such as, the Cree School Board Head Office, Cree Construction Head Office, Asiniy Askihk's Cree Communications Society and the Cree Health Board Inland Office. The local economy has also developed to include services such as gas bar, vehicle service station, grocery store, bank, co-op store, corner store, restaurants, mining exploration, a forestry company, construction and transportation companies and tourism operators.

A research visit to this Northern Cree camp is the ideal opportunity to participate in and observe the effects of language and cultural immersion. A group of students from the University of Alberta and Harvard University, a professor and one student's seven-year-old son traveled to Asiniy Askihk to participate in this immersion experience arranged between the University of Alberta and the people of Asiniy Askihk. This community and their camp are located in a densely forested area. After flying to a main urban center, my trip to Asiniy Askihk then involved thirteen hours of road travel which brought us deeper into the northern part of this Eastern Canadian province. The last forty-five minutes brought a weary, excited group of researchers down narrow dirt roads into unspoiled wilderness. The community describes itself as follows, "With a population of 3200, this community is located near a large fresh water lake. For some thousands of years, [the people] have lived in an area contained by the lakes and rivers…[This] land is rich in fish, birds, big game and fur-bearing animal." An Asiniy Askihk Police Constable joined us as we drove into the final stretch. He welcomed us and escorted us through the community and to a prearranged connection point. After our arrival we were then transported by boat, by the male Elders, to a cultural immersion camp located forty minutes water travel from the community. Finally, we had arrived at our destination.

This was a very new experience. I had never been this far away from my family. A sense of joy filled me as I first viewed the beautiful surroundings of the camp and its '*pakwayankamikwa*' (home made traditional tents). This environment brought back familiar warmth from my childhood. We landed and were greeted by the camp coordinator's wife, daughter and grandson who then escorted us around the camp to meet the rest of the team. The central team was comprised of a camp coordinator and his

family; two sets of married Elders, one single Elder and a male camp support worker. The population of the camp varied as community members and related kinship visited or delivered goods to the camp. During the feast twenty to twenty-five people were in attendance.

The female Elders had remained at the campsite and sat at their traditional tents until we approached them. Immediately, we were given a meal of fresh fish, potatoes and tea. Right away I reacted to the familiarity of the environment and I automatically participated in the meal cleanup. From that moment a feeling of family atmosphere began to grow. In my childhood with my grandmother and mother I was taught to contribute to the preparation of meals. Traditionally if you are a part of a community it was expected that we all share in the preparation and cleanup. This outdoor campsite work was familiar to me. My duties to work side-by-side with the other women would have been expected in my family and I automatically responded in the same manner with this new group of women.

Unlike the research conducted in Nipisiy Askihk, this research is a complete and active participation project. Spradley describes the characteristics of active participation as doing "what other people do to gain acceptance and to learn more of the cultural rules of behavior" and complete participation as "the highest level of involvement and it is complete involvement"(1980, pp.59-60). I did not have to consciously tell myself to fully immerse because this life was part of who I was. In Asiniy Askihk I knew I was there to observe, participate and record any relevant data concerning language transmission and retention. During quiet personal hours I completed field notes and wrote in my reflection journal. I also took photographs when the opportunity seemed appropriate. The majority of my time was spent establishing relationships, listening to the language, and enjoying this traditional way of living.

## Asiniy Askihk Research Findings

I have divided the research findings from my participant observation research in Asiniy Askihk into three main categories. There were numerous observations and experiences

that belong outside of these categories but I chose these three areas to highlight what stood out as most relevant and prevalent

**Elders and Kinship**

The principle of extended kinship throughout the Cree Nation best explains my connection with Asiniy Askihk's people. My personal traditional teaching transfers to anyone of the Cree nations, as we are one large family with kinship ties that expand in the same manner as a circle ripples wider and wider. The Elders of Asiniy Askihk and our Elder/professor acted according to the principle of good relations. Beatrice Medicine elaborates on the significance of kinship and good relations in her 1995 speech to The First Biannual Indigenous Scholars' Conference. "When we speak, we speak with a good heart and surmise that the listener listens with a good heart and that the symbolic handshake unifies us as Aboriginal peoples of all nations in the circularity of life and the world" (Medicine, 1995, p.42).

The unspoken language of kinship and good relations permeated the daily activities of Asiniy Askihk's immersion program. For example, the immersion camp Elders' close relatives and extended family visited the site freely. This extended community involvement and openness was conducted informally. The camp coordinator held the responsibility to explain the kinship connections so the researchers were aware of the reason these people moved throughout the camp. Another striking example of the respect commanded by the traditional doctrine of kinship and good relations was the automatic acknowledgement of the most highly revered Elders. As a result visitors always stopped at the main Elders' tent before circulating with others in the camp.

I observed many examples of traditional ways to address guests, Elders and relations. The university professor was never directly addressed by his first name by the traditional members of the camp. Culturally, direct name usage is a sign of disrespect. When Cree speaking Elders were referring to other researchers, they would motion with their body language in the vicinity of the person they were mentioning. Finger pointing to select someone in the crowd is a very impolite action avoided by traditional Cree people. The

word *'naha'* was commonly used to indicate 'that one' or descriptive names were given to provide others with guidance of what the person is like and how well the person is accepted into the community. I was honored to receive an informal name or term of endearment - *'Tahakapitsow'* which means literally, he or she is useful and implies a 'good, hard worker'. In this immersion experience the name giving and subsequent teasing complimented me. When native people like you they will tease you. This teasing is an accepted behavior that indicates comfort.

The young children received spontaneous instruction whenever the opportunity arose. The camp members shared traditional teachings and encouraged their participation in all the culturally related activities. A researcher's young son accompanied him and was exposed to many traditional concepts and codes of behavior. The researcher explained he had taken this opportunity to assist his son in the process of stepping into manhood. This process was described to me as his son's gradual break away from the mother's nurturing to the father's teaching. Many times they walked and discussed values. Other members of the camp contributed to this young boy's learning by offering advice and instructions. The Elders taught us with an observation and hands-on method. They shared experiences in stories and this required close listening skills. The combination of sharing and listening presented us with many opportunities to learn. Observation, listening and participation were all encouraged. For example, when we learned to clean fish they demonstrated their methods for us and then we attempted to do it ourselves. While we practiced what we had just observed they guided us along carefully.

Implied and spoken Elder status arose frequently. Women's roles and men's roles were understood and accepted. One Elder and his wife were both given respect for their authority and wisdom from the other Elders. This couple was always acknowledged first by anyone entering the camp. In modern terms the symbolic meaning of this gesture could be compared to the respect given to the head of a household. A second Elder couple played a strong supportive role to the central couple, as did the Elder/professor from the university. The coordinator and his wife also contributed by offering

clarification of traditional teachings and understanding. Asiniy Askihk describes the role of the Elders in their website as follows:

> Elders are given the responsibility to keep the memory, history, and knowledge of the [Asiniy Askihk] ancestors. Elders possess the knowledge and understanding of [Asiniy Askihk] teachings. Elders share life experiences and stories to help the people make decisions. Elders play a major role in the resolution of personal, family, community and [Asiniy Askihk] matters.

The Elders in Asiniy Askihk emanated all these traits in our day-to-day activities. In this research their role as transmitters of language and carriers of culture stood above all my other observations.

**The Implicit Nature of the Cree Language**

Simply translated *'îmoyihtâmân'* is Cree for "I sense it." It is understood to describe an intuitive knowing or a feeling that a certain behavior is necessary. Oral tradition demands a high quality of listening and observation. These skills are part of the language. Learning by doing is also a concept that is part of the culture and language. Explanations are simple, direct and often revisited until the student fully grasps the concept or process. I sensed in Asiniy Askihk that the people in the camp were adhering closely to the traditional principles. I knew these protocols and behaviors from my childhood. I understood intuitively when it was necessary to listen or important to participate.

Marjorie Memnook, a Cree instructor with the University of Alberta describes the Cree language as a descriptive language. She states that there are several differences between Cree and English. For example, there is no ambiguity in our language because all of the verb forms match the subject or subjects in number and gender. The gender is determined by animate or inanimate designation. The language is both implicit and explicit; sometimes there is a message underlying the words and other times there are words that are very clear and cannot be explained any further. The Aboriginal researcher knows to understand what is not being said as well as what is being said. There may be

no change in the wording but the context in which the word is used either includes or excludes and can denote a behavior. For example, the term "naha" means "that one". Only the people in the conversation will understand whether "naha" refers to someone in the vicinity or someone hundreds of miles away.

Silence in the Cree language is a very powerful communicator. Even a visit may be comprised of twenty minutes or more of complete silence between the companions. This silence is very different from the silence that indicates a shunning or dissatisfaction by others. The Cree language intrinsically teaches the fluent speaker a wholistic communication that requires the use of all senses simultaneously. This wholistic style of communication utilizes all the senses, requires complete participation on all levels including intuitiveness, re-acknowledges kinships and the traditional view of All My Relations. From this intuitive response to the cultural or traditional expectations it can be described that one experiences many points of tension or *'îmoyihtâmân'*.

Once again, as in Nipisiy Askihk, reactions to a subconscious understanding of my culture prompted me to withdraw or to behave accordingly. In Asiniy Askihk these points of tension were evident in my reactions to timing and dress. Oral traditions require listening skills and note taking is not only a distraction from listening it creates a personal conflict which at times prevented me from writing. In my cultural background writing is a non-traditional, mainstream learning style. Balancing the recording of field notes with cultural respect became complex. Examples of times when I chose to rely upon my oral traditions included the evening of the medicine sharing and the moments when the discussion led to our comparing of traditional ceremonial practices. Listening to our Elders without interrupting is a traditional code of behavior. Any time when topics or teachings touched upon the sacred I instinctively knew not to disturb this process with note taking or questioning. As the majority of this immersion held a level of sanctity and sacredness for me, I confined my recording to early mornings and late evenings.

One moment of *'îmoyihtâmân'* was exemplified by an unspoken dress code. Even during hot weather I knew to respect my woman's role in this cultural setting by wearing

appropriate clothing. At the welcoming banquet/ceremony I wore a skirt to honor the feast. Once again the dress code became evident during the evening when the women shared the teaching of the medicines. These women Elders dressed much more formally than their normal camp attire. I recognized their reverence for the occasion and after taking one photograph I immediately stopped recording in any form.

A very dominant point of tension in this immersion experience occurred when two seemingly unwelcome visitors walked into camp. The behavior of the Elders and other members of Asiniy Askihk communicated that these people were not very well liked. The intruders were not acknowledged with the usual welcoming atmosphere, the camp hosts' body language was cold and shunning. The visitors' stride, as they approached the encampment, indicated that they were unsure of their welcome. A hush settled over the group as they approached. Stiffer body language, changed facial expressions and gestures indicated to me that these ones were not accepted. Shunning of disrespected members for past indiscretions is a form of traditional discipline I was familiar with. As a result I did not bring this situation up for discussion. This was a very strong indicator of the implicitness of our codes of behavior.

**Surviving the Residential School Legacy**

Countless Aboriginal communities were overcome with many of their people suffering the impact of residential school experiences. Asiniy Askihk is no exception. During my immersion in camp, I observed a numbered of incidents that I now reflect upon as residential school influence. At a Saturday evening gathering the camp coordinator informed us of a Sunday morning service in one of the Elder's tents. I gladly participated in this Sunday service, which was conducted in Cree service. Although the songs and prayers were spoken and sung in Cree, I recognized the translated Christian hymns and biblical teachings.

Another incident reminisce of the residential school occurred when I mentioned my love for 'Cream of Wheat' cereal for breakfast. A subtle silence followed this comment. The following day I discovered a box of 'Cream of Wheat' in one of the food baskets. The

camp coordinator had purchased it for me and later confided that this food was not allowed in their home. Through other discussions, I became aware there were certain foods that are forbidden in the many homes because it reminds them of residential school days. The "cream of wheat' incident symbolized, to me, the community-wide determination to eradicate any residential school impact and memories.

Schooling in this area transcended from Catholic and Anglican missionary run institutions, to government controlled curricula and finally to an unwavering, self-determination action by a locally run school board. The strength and resolve of the people of this northern area is reflected in their subsequent Cree philosophy of education. The following is an excerpt from the vision of Asiniy Askihk's regional Cree School Board.

**The Cree School Board will ensure that each student has the opportunity to develop his or her full potential as an individual and as a member of society.**

**We believe that:**
**The Cree language and culture is the root of the Cree education system**
**We believe that the Cree child:**
- is unique
- is entitled to proper spiritual, emotional, mental and physical development
- begins to learn before and from birth. It is our duty to foster the growth of this learning
- has the right to learn and be taught in his or her Mother tongue
- has the right to be taught and practice his or her culture and its value system
- must be taught to be non-judgmental, aware, and comfortable being a Cree person
- has the right to be provided with the opportunity for support and resources according to his or her needs
- is to be provided the opportunity to follow any level of academic, technical vocational and Cree traditional education.

Predominately visible in Asiniy Askihk is the use of the Cree syllabics (Appendix 1). On a brief guided tour to the elementary school, I was struck by the consistent use of Cree language and syllabics. The tour group gasped in awe; language, culture and syllabics were everywhere we looked! In Asiniy Askihk, the students arrive at school speaking Cree and continued their immersion education in their mother tongue until grade three, at which time their form of instruction transits into English as a second language. The elementary teachers are all First Nations.

Our tour guide explained that the students attend a compulsory cultural camp in the bush. The Cree language and culture retention is reinforced by parental and community involvement. This is evident on the street signs, reading material and on business cards. I witnessed social activities and casual conversations conducted in the Cree language. Elders, parents, teachers, children and band council members all spoke in their mother tongue. This atmosphere of hearing my language and being immersed brought me a sense of gratitude and hope. Unified as one, they were walking their talk!

**Comparison of Nipisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk**

Located at opposite ends of the nation, these two northern Canadian communities are both Cree by tribal affiliation. Their commonalities include defined women's roles, language, traditional connection with the land, and a sacred respect for plant medicines and kinship.

**Variations Between the Two Communities**

- In Asiniy Askihk Cree was the dominant language. English was relied upon only when necessary. In Nipisiy Askihk the English and Cree were used interchangeably with a preference for English. It is very clear English is the first language in many Nipisiy Askihk homes and Cree is the first language in Asiniy Askihk homes.
- The Cree language is spoken in different dialects in each of these communities.
- In Asiniy Askihk syllabic writing is visible, used frequently and has developed a more complex structure. Nipisiy Askihk does not use syllabics at all.
- The two communities had developed very different ceremonies and rituals which evolved locally. In Nipisiy Askihk there are pipe carriers, round dances, sweat lodges, sweet grass and sage smudges and honor for the protocol of tobacco and gift giving. Asiniy Askihk practices a 'Walking Out Ceremony' and holds the drum in the highest place of reverence while in Nipisiy Askihk some members use the drum indiscriminately.
- The Elders are very influential and proactive in the Cree language teaching and culture immersion programming in Asiniy Askihk. In Nipisiy Askihk the Elder's

place is understood to be relevant but their roles in decision making and education has been displaced.

- Homemade tents, hand carved items, sewn clothing and practical methods such as hunting, trapping and tanning hides to live off the land frequent Asiniy Askihk daily life. Nipisiy Askihk's access to traditional knowledge and handmade culturally relevant products is very limited. Community members often travel outside of their area to gain knowledge or to purchase crafts that once would have been prevalent in this area.
- Asiniy Askihk demonstrated a level of cohesiveness and unity while Nipisiy Askihk displayed a disjointed and fragmented community vision and this internal frustration surfaced in a political protest.
- Asiniy Askihk band members utilize their traditional hunting and trapping areas in their education while Nipisiy Askihk does not utilizes their traditional hunting and trapping areas as a cultural training area.
- Nipisiy Askihk has one representative on the Provincial Catholic School Board with no voting authority. Asiniy Askihk has strong representation in a locally run Regional Cree School Board.
- Nipisiy Askihk does not provide local education in a community owned school. Members vocalize that a local school would threaten the quality of education that is concurrent with mainstream education, so in response to the goal to maintain culture and language the Nipisiy Askihk council funds a language program in partnership with the provincial school system. Asiniy Askihk run their own school, develop local curriculum and incorporate community skills and values in the education of their youth.
- Asiniy Askihk has a much larger population base than Nipisiy Askihk but Asiniy Askihk has achieved much of their success by partnering with other bands in their region.

In comparison to Nipisiy Askihk, Asiniy Askihk was further advanced in their program development. Asiniy Askihk had found unity in a common goal to hold their Cree language and culture at the forefront of all other decision-making.

**Cultural Adaptation or Acculturation**

When cultures adapt to an outside culture the intensity of their adjustments are measured by various academics in anthropology and sociology in terms of assimilation, diffusion and acculturation. Acculturation is described as the natural adaptation or adoption of cultural values and beliefs. For example, today's Aboriginal youth are exposed to television, mainstream schools, media and technology geared towards a larger, Euro-centric society. Assimilation absorbs the minority culture into the dominant culture. In this process a dominant culture prevails and feeds its cultural beliefs and values to the minority group. Adaptation makes cultural adjustments in response to changes in the surroundings. Diffusion describes the spread of cultural practices from one community to another.

Nipisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk both shared past and current pressures from the dominant society to assimilate. There were also many motivating factors that contributed to their assimilation, acculturation, adaptation or adoption of certain practices. The two communities reacted to these external pressures in distinctly different ways. Nipisiy Askihk can be described as searching for balance between the two worldviews, one from their traditional background and one from the dominant society. Each of these worldviews has strong influence in their community. In their attempt to balance past acculturation and assimilation influences Nipisy Askihk fluctuates between the residential school era's effect and the underlying sway of their traditional Cree culture. In contrast, Asiniy Askihk has clearly chosen the Cree culture as the dominant influence in their community and as a result, defines itself according to their traditional cultural standards.

Nipisiy Askihk adheres to mainstream systems and in order to survive under the past pressures of residential school education their unifying language and culture has nearly been sacrificed. In this community the members struggle to find cultural balance while they contend with the constraints of mainstream guidelines. Cultural preservation is becoming increasingly difficult. At best, mainstream school programming provides language instruction, which is available only because the existing system makes room for

some culturally sensitive initiatives. As a result of very little input from the surrounding Aboriginal communities, mainstream systems control the quantity and quality of cultural content in the schools. Currently, because of the small school sizes and the community's size, funding is limited. Nipisiy Askihk is also closer to the Catholic and public schools than Asiniy Askihk. This limitation in size that would generate a larger financial base and the proximity of outside schooling has forced Nipisiy Askihk to adapt to these, sometimes, conflicting mainstream standards and expectations.

Asiniy Askihk has adopted contemporary media to include informative websites, radio programming in Cree and television programming in Cree. This reinforces and promotes the use of their language and teaches cultural values in a contemporary environment. Asiniy Askihk has also developed a cultural immersion camp and a strong language curriculum in their schools. These initiatives have taken approximately twenty-five years to develop and implement. Currently, Nipisiy Askihk youth have very little exposure to radio or television programming in their Cree language. Their education is largely dependant upon the non-native schools in the nearest communities while Asiniy Askihk has their own schools and a greater influence in the daily education of their children.

Asiniy Askihk takes what they want from the mainstream society and adjusts it to fit their cultural standards. Only those tools that increase their cultural survival are adapted. In Asiniy Askihk the school system focuses on internal community goals and aspirations. Children, first, learn from their community and second, learn to adapt to the larger society. Asiniy Askihk represents a political, social and economic unit that overrides outside intervention and adapts to mainstream, only when it fits their unified vision of cultural preservation.

This contrast between each communities approach to self-directed education policies, language retention and cultural preservation is alarming. In retrospect, Asiniy Askihk and Nipisiy Askihk have reacted to a similar history of mainstream assimilation policies with reverse strategies. Until Nipisiy Askihk discovers a central strength in their own culture they may continue to allow the existing education system and the mainstream

ideologies guide their decision-making. Although Elders in Nipisiy Askihk recognize the loss of culture and the devastating effect it is having, they also believe the future success of their youth rests on their adaptability to the dominant society. This community's protesting and internal conflict is an indicator of the opposing values and beliefs playing against each other. They face many challenges as they attempt to reconcile imposed cultural beliefs to their traditional Cree beliefs.

Asiniy Askihk built their lifestyle, their political policies and their social structure on a strong traditional foundation. Nipisiy Askihk grieves the loss of this foundation, angrily point fingers at each other and attempts to adjust to what seems to be the 'inevitable' outcome of assimilation. One community expresses their ideal cultural base and another community searches for a vision of their ideal cultural base. Beatrice Medicine expresses this sentiment profoundly when she states that "...in every aspect of culture there is the ideal (which we espouse), and there is the real (which we do). When we understand this, we have a strong notion of who we are and in what kind of society we exist" (Medicine, 1995, p.44). Nipisiy Askihk talks about cultural loss; Asiniy Askihk takes action to preserve culture and prevent language loss.

**Nipisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk Education Issues**

All the symptoms of cultural breakdown are evident in Nipisiy Askihk. The common indicators such as high unemployment rates, a high percentage of incarceration, a high dropout rate, alarming high levels of substance abuse and increasing youth suicides can all be attributed to social and cultural corrosion. Asiniy Askihk's past experience includes many of these social problems but their education programming laid the groundwork for the re-establishing a strong cultural identity in their youth. Asiniy Askihk encourages the hiring of local Aboriginal educators and a strong Elder influence is always maintained. Language education provides the cohesive medium that enhances the community's traditional values. While the background of the teachers in the primary grades is predominantly Aboriginal, those teachers who come from the outside of the community adhere to local curriculum. Asiniy Askihk has simply advanced their goals to

retain their culture and language, and to achieve this goal they utilize the schools in conjunction with strong community involvement.

Systemic barriers, the lack of qualified teachers for the region and the lack of teaching materials are challenges all Aboriginal communities face. Internal and external political will is necessary if Nipisiy Askihk is to entertain the idea of cultural revival. To gain the momentum necessary to combat these many challenges language education and cultural content in the schools must be done in conjunction with the Elders and the parents in the community. The model of the Maori experience demonstrated that language programming had a profound effect on Aboriginal communities. From the initial language nests many positive side effects resulted. The Maori principles of a shared collective vision, self-determination, cultural validation, incorporating a cultural pedagogy and the principle of incorporating community, school and family creates an atmosphere that has successfully alleviated seemingly overwhelming social problems.

> The benefits of [immersion programs] within the community extends also to the pride developed and identity regained by the children who attend. Loss of language carries with it a loss of culture and a loss of identity. Children enrolled in these programs have a much greater sense of who they are and have regained at least a sense of heritage. Loss of identity for teenagers can lead to gang activity, alcohol and drug abuse, and a high drop out rate (Stiles, 1997, p.9).

It may seem obvious, from this research that Nipisiy Askihk would benefit greatly from a local school and a self-determined education approach. This is not necessarily so. Nipisiy Askihk may benefit from a stronger involvement in the existing education system if this system responded positively to their requirements. "The majority society cannot successfully impose programs on the indigenous culture, but successful components from indigenous programs could be transferred to the majority system for use in bilingual/bicultural education..."(Stiles, 1997, p.10). Nipisiy Askihk clearly indicated a lack of interest in a locally run school. This disinterest is also influenced by the their low population numbers relative to Asiniy Askihk. The size of Nipisiy Askihk and the

disunity with other communities surrounding them makes the likelihood of a locally run school unlikely.

Ethnographic research in both these Aboriginal communities inspired my conviction that our traditional culture and language can be re-rooted in our children and retained in our communities. The background research reviewing the existing models for successful language revitalization reinforced this realization. I recognized that Nipisiy Askihk was in the early stages of defining their educational direction and like their predecessors are experiencing many symptoms of dissention and disunity. Balancing the community member's concerns, the lack of funding and the mainstream indoctrination of Aboriginal children were roadblocks common in Hawaii, New Zealand, Arizona and James Bay. During their early stages of development, they too were challenged to negotiate around internal community fears, assimilation legacies and alarmingly high statistics suggesting their children were losing their cultural roots and their languages were disappearing.

For Nipisiy Askihk the education of their children was, is and will always be the highest priority. If there was one common theme in the interviews conducted at Nipisiy Askihk it was the theme that the community members recognized education as essential for their progress and future improvements. Education is a treaty right recognized by the federal government and the Nipisiy Askihk people feel this treaty right must be honored to ensure their children receive the maximum benefit from their education. Relationships between the governments, the schools, the community members and the local Elders need to be developed to increase communication and positive action.

> When there is a lack of empathy between schools and communities, frustrations and difficulties are likely to arise. Where communities, families and schools feel powerless to effectively engage with each other, a child's enthusiasm for learning and actual achievement can be lessened, with unhappy consequences usually appearing when it is more difficult to do anything about it (Fancy, 2001, p.4).

There are difficult issues to negotiate. If the schools foster a positive dialogue with Nipisiy Askihk and they provide a warm, welcoming atmosphere for the Aboriginal

parents and Elders, then language and cultural programming could be enhanced to better serve the needs of this community.

# CHAPTER FIVE: REFLECTIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

## Conflicting Worldviews in Nipisiy Askihk

A re-occurring theme of tension surfaced throughout this language retention research project. My initial research excursion to Nipisiy Askihk was besieged with personal tensions and community tensions. Before I arrived I had received a message that possible political unrest was impending and may result in a full-blown protest. On my journey I prayed for guidance. How was I to balance my role as a participant observer and maintain my insider/outsider objectivity? Who would best serve as my selected participants when the community was currently so divided? How would my activities as a researcher from the University be accepted? All these questions weighed heavily on my mind.

My thoughts and worries manifested throughout my fieldwork. Participants were often distracted by community pressures or by their preoccupation with the protesting band members. During three interviews there was shouting and name-calling in the background. Shortly after the completion of my interviews, barricades closed off the only road in and out of the band office yet somehow I was able to maneuver my way through. This protest symbolized community unhappiness and their many deep internalized tensions in the community as a whole. All of the interviewees in Nipisiy Askihk exhibited symptoms of apprehension in their body language. As we discussed their personal education experiences and the choices their community faced concerning the education of their youth, many conflicting opinions arose. There were contradictory comments woven throughout the interviews and casual conversations. Their grief for cultural loss, for the breakdown of the traditional worldview and the impending loss of their language could not be reconciled with strongly held convictions that the Mission school was a positive experience and today's mainstream schooling is very important to their children's future success.

As I contemplated my experiences and reviewed the tapes, photos and notes I felt the internal battle between the two worldviews. One worldview was wholistic, based on the

doctrine of All My Relations, extended family and kinship values and the cyclical relationship Aboriginal people feel with the land, the elements and the Mother Earth. The other very influential worldview was rooted in the residential school experience and the acculturated linear individual focus toward personal success and recognizes the predominance of the mainstream culture. There were tensions in the Elder's discussion of their mission school experiences, which had indoctrinated them to believe their culture was inferior and would not sustain the future generations. A tension existed in their memories concerning their gratitude for the provision of food by the mission school and the opportunity to learn valuable skills necessary for survival. This respect, tolerance and gratitude sometimes undermined the value of the Cree language and ceremonies. Underlying interviewee's comments was the conviction that to survive, adherence to mainstream standards was imperative. The separation between what was expected and what was natural occurred in the minds and hearts of the individual and manifested in kinship breakdown that split the community.

An overview of the research indicated that the Elder participant were sometimes unsure of whether the Mission had been a negative or positive experience. The next generation participants understood the devastating effect of residential schools on their cultural cohesion but they were still at a loss concerning how to proceed to remedy the fragmentation of their Aboriginal epistemology. This historical loss of language and culture resulted in many overt tensions as the interviews progressed. For example, I felt tension as I attempted to focus the interviews in the Cree language. Why did the Elders, whom I knew were fluent in their language, not want to carry the conversations in Cree? My traditional protocols did not permit me to directly question an Elder's behavior so I did not disrespect their choice to speak in English. This not only created a tension for me as a researcher it also can be interpreted as a tension between two worldviews and both of our difficulties in determining which behavior or language would be appropriate for the situation. I suspected that the Elders perceived my research as an academic process and they wanted to facilitate my success. Because they respected my educational aspirations, the Elders supported my research, which in their mind was very formal and rooted in the English language. My pen, my paper and my tape recorder indicated this was not a

casual conversation so English automatically became the predominant mode of communication. During other informal visits to Nipisiy Askihk these same people speak comfortably in Cree, yet during the interviews they insisted on using English.

The Nipisiy Askihk members could not justify operating a locally run school and the return to their traditional Elders as the main source of education. Although in their hearts this would be ideal, the push and pull of the outside world prevented cohesive decisions to stand strong in this conviction. One participant commented:

> I would like to have a school on the reserve. I know there are a lot of spin offs and a lot of benefits. We can implement our own native language and culture but I don't know if I'll see it in my lifetime!

This comment summarizes the ongoing struggle Nipisiy Askihk contends with as they attempt to balance mainstream standards with their respect for traditional ways. The looming unspoken question remains. How can this Aboriginal community retain their language, their culture and their Elder's wisdom under the continuing re-structuring that is always about conforming to another worldview?

**Observations of Silent Conviction in Asiniy Askihk**

During my visit to Asiniy Askihk I was amazed at the calmness these people emanated as they went about their daily activities. I was also amazed at how quickly I felt a sense of being at home. Minor tensions arose and could be attributed to an uncomfortable reaction to traditional codes of behavior and the community determination not to conform to the outside world. In this community and in the Cree language there are many messages that are imparted through unspoken indicators. Observation of traditional manners and recognizing expected behaviors sometimes created a personal tension until I chose to follow the way of the camp. For example, there are traditional codes of behavior and dress. My dressing in proper attire indicated my honor for the situation and respect for the traditional ways. During sacred moments silence indicates respect and during these times attentive listening is required. There were many times during my research I instinctively knew it was important to participate and observe without much note taking, tape recording or photo taking.

If there was any tension it was in the silence. Changes in attire, the reverent moments before the sacred teachings, the silent shunning of outsiders or unwanted visitors, the quiet unspoken acknowledgement of the other Elders, and the silent observation of the researcher without a tape recorder or a notebook are all examples of highly important observations highlighted by silence. During these moments of silence I felt the traditional pull to pay attention. Silence triggered my Aboriginal connection and corrected my behavior when I did not understand. I knew to participate with the work of the women, although nothing was said. I knew to dress appropriately although inappropriate dress would not have been disciplined. I knew when the Elders were unhappy or concerned by their silence. I knew when to ask questions and when to listen attentively. While working side by side with the others their silence comforted me and reaffirmed my Aboriginal connections.

A catalyst for self-determination and the cohesive action to retain their language and culture existed in the negative reactions to past residential school experiences. Whenever a memory of previous schooling was brought up in discussion many people in this community displayed stiff body language and tense voice tones. Their determination was unified. Again this tension remained in the silence. The resolve to learn from the past and restore their worldview for the future generations was an undertone that permeated throughout the immersion. Anything from the contemporary world was adjusted to adhere to the traditional worldview. Translators spoke for those who did not understand Cree and this emphasis stressed the importance of the language. All building and road signs displayed syllabics. The school curricula were designed to respond to the four seasons, the trapping and hunting lifestyle.

In Asiniy Askihk, their conviction and unity was expressed in a silent fortitude. Outsiders that threatened their cultural continuity were shunned silently and those who supported their goal were embraced as kin. Although this community faced many challenges reconciling their education system with the mainstream education system, the Cree culture is dominant in this region. The challenges are being faced with local unity and a strong awareness that their vision will expand through the traditional education of

the upcoming Asiniy Askihk youth. During my immersion in Asiniy Askihk I wondered why I did not feel the same relaxed oneness with Nipisiy Askihk people. For some reason I felt more at home in this new environment than I did in the tense environment of Nipisiy Askihk and this saddened me.

**Recommendation for Participatory Action Research**

Although these research findings indicate differences and similarities between Nipisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk, further research is necessary for substantiation. Elders in both communities recognize the loss of culture and the devastating effect it is having. They also encourage a focus on the future generations, which would entail the teaching of culture, traditional values and language to the youth. In both cases, success is defined as the ability to live well in a world of mixed cultures while maintaining Aboriginal distinctness.

*'Kîs'pin kaya nakatîtamayahkik kinîhiyawenaw ekosi kawânîtanaw'*. Literally translated this means if we don't take care of our way of life as Cree people, it will come to an end, and we will all lose. This commonly expressed sentiment carries weight in our language because it expresses a danger sign that requires heeding. It is a very powerful warning from many of our Elders. Many Aboriginal people share this worrisome sentiment across Canada. Although First Nations heed the warning, they are swept up in self-governance initiatives and contending with the deep, eroding effects of past assimilation. Family breakdown, addictions, political upheaval and joblessness demand the attention of the decision makers. In the midst of this turmoil Elders lament their disappearing culture, language and kinship ties. This is all attributed to the loss of the traditional ways. Sadly, we are in the process of losing our language, our culture, our stories, our code of ethics and our philosophy. In our quest to gain political status and material comforts, our focus is distracted. While prosperity for our families is a good thing we must not forget to nurture our culture and language. Elders for the last fifty years have been warning us of our impending loss but are we really listening; are we paying any attention?

**Summary of the Research**

I visited the first community (Nipisiy Askihk) for ten days with the intention of identifying education issues and with a primary concentration on the Cree language as the transmitter of culture. The visit to the second community (Asiniy Askihk) involved a trip across the provinces to another Cree nation with the same intention and focus. Nipisiy Askihk defines its educational process according to mainstream practices and a substantial number of observed participants expressed frustrations with the mainstream's lack of cultural sensitivity. In contrast, Asiniy Askihk is determined to provide a strong language and cultural foundation during early childhood development. This is achieved while still maintaining educational standards compatible with mainstream practices.

Asiniy Askihk's children are immersed in their language and culture in the home and during their primary school years. Syllabics are very visible and reinforced during the primary grades. The Cree language permeates all activities and classroom teaching. This community has also taken a strong stand to retain their traditions. Central to this vision is their firmness of purpose to hold their language and their connection to the land as a foundation for all other learning experiences. This policy floods into their home life, their schooling and their social interaction with other Cree people.

Nipisiy Askihk, a much smaller Cree community, exerts great efforts to cope with many issues that often can be traced back to residential school assimilation practices. This community suffers from a breakdown of traditional practices, beliefs and values. This is evident in preliminary research findings that identified a cycle of blame. Basically, in their frustration, members blame each other for the loss of their Cree language and culture. Although the core cultural understanding and language still exists with some individual community members, this is not incorporated, wholistically, in the methods of raising their children. Language and traditional values are present but they are not given the stature as witnessed in Asiniy Askihk. If the people of Nipisiy Askihk become unified and proactive before the last of their Elders pass on, a final loss can be prevented. Nipisiy Askihk faces seemingly insurmountable barriers. The loss of language, community dissention and broken kinship ties all magnify issues rather than produce

solutions. The problem is Nipisiy Askihk does not have a common vision to instigate language retention goals and objectives.

If Nipisiy Askihk indicates an interest, I would suggest a unified effort by community leaders, Elders, parents and educators to turn this dissolving of language and culture into a catalyst for the rediscovery of a community spirit and vision. Therefore, to encourage Nipisiy Askihk that traditions, kinship and language can be revitalized, I recommend the selection of key members to fully participate in a exploratory project that introduces them to another community that is experiencing language resurgence and cultural empowerment. To complement mainstream actions, I also recommend community based cultural awareness programs to increase community cohesiveness and to simulate language revival interests. These programs would include introducing Nipisiy Askihk Elders to the language immersion opportunities at Asiniy Askihk. The Elders from both groups may facilitate the sharing of experiences and solutions. This would possibly encourage more Cree language use at a community level. Nipisiy Askihk would provide and example of how traditionally based cultural activities can reaffirm kinship ties and community bonding.

I also recommend a partnership between Nipisiy Askihk and Asiniy Askihk to provide role modeling for the development of these programs. This partnership would hopefully encourage a mentor-based relationship. Asiniy Askihk would benefit from other Cree people utilizing their camp because the positive feedback will act as an encouraging factor. Nipisiy Askihk would also benefit as this may open a doorway to explore solutions and possibly adapt these solutions to their unique situation.

**Kinship Considerations and Wholistic Practices**

Recent years have produced an abundance of academic literature analyzing language loss. The linguistic analysts panic in concern for the extinction of indigenous languages. As a result they bombard students, researchers and interested parties with recommendations and ideal language revitalization theories and/or model language maintenance scenarios. One common theme arises. The will to maintain or renew a dying language must begin

within the community and be instigated by a common community vision. To compliment this, resources must be made available when a community commits to establishing programs to reinforce their language and traditional base.

Language restoration projects are viable and the ripple effect spreads into all aspects of community life because language is culture and culture is kinship. In a speech delivered by Dr. Joshua Fishman to a symposium on stabilizing indigenous languages he describes language as "being the spirit of the people". He also said that when people describe the reasons why they value their language

> ...[they] tell you about kinship. They tell you that their mother spoke the language to them, their father spoke the language, their brothers, the sisters, the uncles, the aunts, the whole community. All the endearments, all the nurturing, that is kinship is tied into a living organism of a community by people who know each other, and they know they belong together (Cantoni (ed.), 1997, p.83).

Language reinforces kinship, traditional values and the wholistic relationship within the community. Fishman adamantly states, "This is what they would lose if they lost the language. They would lose a member of the family, an article of faith, and a commitment in life" (Cantoni (ed.), 1997, p.83).

The kinship breakdown, community dissention and a lack of collective mission are all evident in the preliminary research in Nipisiy Askihk. There is a reoccurring concern by community members for this loss of kinship. During protest activities in Nipisiy Askihk I overheard an Elder expressing this woe, *'wahkohtowin ewanihtayahk'* which translated means we've lost our idea of how we are related. Fishman describes this grief when he states "Woe to the people who have lost the sense of holiness, where nothing matters and woe to the people who have lost a commitment one to the other" (Cantoni (ed.), 1997, p.83).

In Asiniy Askihk kinship ties and traditional values are interwoven with educational experiences. Elders and family members reinforce connections. Even though Asiniy Askihk people are busy at the immersion camp, family members felt free to drop in

casually. Traditional formalities and courtesies are common when family members visit. In this immersion program Elders are given reverence and related visitors are recognized for their bloodline ties. Kinship ties are explained to the researchers and the principle of 'good relations' is obvious. Community members speak their mother tongue fluently and frequently. Cree is the first language in the schools, in the immersion camp, and in the community.

The Aboriginal wholistic worldview is a necessary component to any traditional program. Language revitalization programming is no different. Language must include cultural concepts and be treated as part of a wholistic concept. " ...[The] fundamental goal of all First Nations language programs is to contribute to restoring the mental, spiritual, physical and emotional wholeness of the community" (Fettes, 1992, p.4). This recommendation for community participatory research activities has the purpose to expose key members of Nipisiy Askihk to the strength of conviction of Asiniy Askihk with the hope that Nipisiy Askihk may be inspired to create their own vision of language and cultural retention. A wholistic approach would therefore require the participation of parents, Elders, children, band council members and educators. "The community has to be persuaded that a language program is both feasible and beneficial" (Fettes, 1992, p.5).

Asiniy Askihk is one model for success. Nipisiy Askihk will benefit from contact with role models for positive assertive action. The fact that these communities are both Cree and located in a northern geographical area suggests a high potential for compatibility and respect. The familiar warmth I felt in the area is rooted in my common ancestral bonds and my familiarity with the lifestyle from my childhood that lies quietly in the back of my mind. If Nipisiy Askihk members sense this silent, magnetic connection, then a positive relationship will grow. "First and foremost, the language itself needs to be seen as something both valuable and relevant to everyday concerns" (Fettes, 1992, p.3). The first step in language and culture revitalization is re-establishing kinship traditions and motivating the community.

**Consent and Unity -The Driving Force**

Linguistic researchers have noted other communities with similar characteristics. Heather Blair and Shirley Fredeen describe the general profile of language death.

> The profile of language death generally includes evidence of fewer and fewer speakers, a reduction in the use of the language, more association with speakers of the more prestigious language, an increase in the need for bilingualism and in the number of bilinguals, less and less acquisition of the mother tongue, and an increase in the age of the fluent speakers, who eventually die leaving less proficient speakers." (1995, p.32)

Preliminary research suggests Nipisiy Askihk presently fits this profile. In this research Nipisiy Askihk Elders expressed regret for not encouraging the usage of the mother tongue. This occurred because during residential school training the Cree language was seen as a handicap rather than an asset. When this community connects with another community where the relationship between spiritual well-being, kinship and community conviction is obvious then they will understand language is the key to strengthening the family unit and therefore building a strong community. The idea of sharing practices is traditional and also encouraged by contemporary program developers. In the research investigating the success of the language immersion models in Arizona, New Zealand and Hawaii each program experienced positive community unity when members of the community were exposed to self-determined immersion initiatives. The Hawaiian project developers investigated the Maori experiences and by adapting their policies they were able to also instill a community vision even though each areas' implement strategies required adjustments to their unique environments.

The positive side effects of language revitalization programs are well documented. Norma Lofthouse, in her paper for the Aboriginal Education Branch, British Columbia, states, "Research shows that instruction in Aboriginal languages does not "hold back" students but empowers them to succeed in school. Identification with Aboriginal languages and tradition helps develop student esteem and cultural identity in ways that promote academic success" (http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/research/esr/toc.htm).

The four model communities discussed earlier in this paper also exhibited high resistance to language revitalization projects in the earlier stages of implementation. Nipisiy Askihk can be described as an Aboriginal community in these early stages because these similar concerns are predominant. Dawn Stiles summarizes these resistant characteristics as follows:

> All of the communities in these four programs experienced community objections to a program that taught the native tongue so seriously. Elders objected to the writing of the language (Cree and Hualapai); elders and parents feared teaching the children a language other than English because of past oppression for use of their native language (all programs); parents as non-speakers doubted the ability of their children to achieve fluency; and teachers were convinced the languages were unsuitable for academic endeavors. (1997, p.8)

Interviews in Nipisiy Askihk revealed comparable fears and sentiments. An participant in Nipisiy Askihk stated, "One thing I did wrong as a parent, at that time was, I did not want them to learn Cree. I wanted them to learn English because it was the spoken language, to get along with the white people. ...That idea came from the mission and I realize now it was not the way to go". Although the participant regrets not passing on the language and recognizes this loss, numerous surveys of other families in Nipisiy Askihk indicated that others in the community are not interested in a community school. Could this indicate that they do not believe their children would benefit from education in their language? Many comments in the interviews revealed that community members feel self-directed education programs will hinder their childrens' compatibility when they move into outside education systems.

Notably, in the four models discussed by Stiles, these same fears were eventually reversed so dramatically that parents and Elders from these communities now actively defend the language retention programs. To emphasize this point Stiles refers to documentation of congress hearings where "Parents, who were once against the program, have even gone before congress to testify on behalf of the program they believe to be integral to the educational success of their children" (Rawlins in Stiles, 1997). All these

people, in each of these models, became so convinced that they continuously lobby their governments for resources and support. These parents witnessed a positive change in their youths' education successes, attitudes toward their Elders and their continuing cultural pride.

## Overview

The Aboriginal source of knowledge is their Elders; the mainstream source of knowledge is in the libraries and in their schools. Contemporary education is responding to self-determination and cultural sensitivity policies by including Elders superficially. Even in First Nation schools the message is conflicting. Youth are told to listen and learn when their Elders are present yet the Elders presentations are limited to occasional, on-site visits controlled by mainstream frameworks. There is no real transmission of culture, merely token recognition of the Elder's contribution to the community as a carrier of a historical, belief system. As a result the Elders are uncomfortable in their role. As soon as they step into the school they have stepped out of their world and they know they are required to conform to the situation. The traditional role of the Elder sways back and forth between valued and devalued. Even some Aboriginal people educated in the mainstream expect the Elders to conform rather than be listened to because they believe they have a better understanding of the issues as it was presented to them in the textbooks. The Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples research and consultation process resulted in the same conclusion that the schools are not showing the Elders the stature and respect that they traditionally held.

> Elders expressed a deep concern to the Commission about the current state of education. While they do not reject participation in Canadian education, they question the exclusion of traditional knowledge and its methods of transmission. …To the despair of the elders, when they try to become involved in the education process, they find many obstacles. There have been few resources in the school systems to support the involvement of elders. (RCAP Vol. 3, 1996, p.528)

The staff and administration in the schools are often restricted by curriculum requirements, very little funding for Elder participation and strict certification procedures.

Elders must be involved in all levels of education including the formal education process. To facilitate this process and the recognition that Elders are the carriers of culture the Royal Commission Report on Aboriginal Peoples recommended a much higher level of consultation and participation in Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal education systems. "If intergenerational education processes are to be restored, obstacles to elder's participation must be overcome. Elders must become an integral part of the learning process for Aboriginal children and youth" (RCAP,Vol 3, 1996, p.528).

In this research project I passionately observed two distinctly different approaches to culture and language. One community is unified in its action and individuals share a common vision to retain the central concepts that are the nature of their culture. This community stands strong for language preservation and is implementing many programs to support language retention. This is evident throughout their schools, homes, political arena and social gatherings. The other community grieves its loss of language and culture but does not exhibit a sense of unified vision. More importantly, as a Cree woman, I felt a powerful, spiritual connection with the Asiniy Askihk community and their Elders. My immersion visit was more like a visit home. Could this be the connection to my ancestors' culture and, if so, could others find the same sense of connectedness inspirational?

A discussion with a distinguished local Elder, disclosed many insights concerning what research means. In conclusion my research must include this Elder's words of wisdom. In our discussion I was reminded that we are all connected. Research, therefore, can only be one individuals' contribution to the collective search for knowledge and knowing. This Elder stated that no matter how progressive we think we are, the progressive world is still trying to figure out what the ancient cultures knew. There is much talk about self-determination, autonomy and independence yet this Elder reminds us "human beings are pitiful things because they think they are independent. Even the concept of culture is based on this belief that we are independent as cultures, and all of this is a falsehood. The reality is everything is dependant and we are dependant on each other. So, research, too is totally dependant on the collective involvement and acceptance."

Without the encouragement, motivation, enthusiasm and passion of the First Nation's program at the University of Alberta, and the support of the research participants - this research would not have happened. Without the existence of multiple worldviews and the political negotiations to reconcile differing ideologies we would not learn how much we all value our roots, our languages and our cultures.

## References

Aha Punana Leo Organization. (2001). Our Language. http://www.ahapunanaleo.org.

Atkinson, Paul & Hammersley, Martyn. (1995). Ethnography Principles in Practice. Second Edition. New York:Routledge

Battiste, Marie. (2000). Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision. Maintaining Aboriginal Identity, Language and Culture. Vancouver: UBC Press.

Berg, B.L. (1998). Qualitative Research Methods for the Social Sciences. Third Edition. Toronto: Allyn & Bacon.

Bernard, H. Russell (2000). Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches. Social Research Methods. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Blair, Heather and Fredden, Shirley. (1995). Do Not Go Gentle Into That Good Night. Rage, Rage, against the Dying of the Light. Anthropology & Education Quarterly. 26(1):27-49. American Anthropological Association.

Brandt, Elizabeth & Youngman, Vivian (1989) Canadian Journal of Native Education. Vol. 16. No. 2. Language Renewal and Language Maintenance: A Practical Guide. Vancouver: University of British Columbia

Burnaby, Barbara (1996). Aboriginal Language Maintenance, Development, and Enhancement: A Review of Literature. Presented at the 1996 Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Conference, Northern Arizona: University. ED 395 730

Cantoni, Gina (ed.). (1997). What Do You Lose When You Lose

Your Language? Stabilizing Indigenous Languages. Flagstaff, Arizona: Northern Arizona University.

Cardinal, H. & Hildebrandt, W. (2000) Treaty Elders of Saskatchewan: Our Dream is That Our Peoples Will One Day Be Clearly Recognized as Nations. Calgary Alberta: University of Calgary Press.

Cardinal, Lewis. In University of Alberta. Department of Education Policies: First Nations' Masters and Doctoral Program. Unpublished work. (2001) Transcription of Audio Taped Discussion Regarding Indigenous Research Methodologies.

Crawford, James. (1995). Endangered Native American Languages: What Is To Be Done, and Why? The Bilingual Research Journal. Winter 1995, Vol. 19, No.1. Arizona: Arizona State University.

Denzin, N.K. (1989). The Research Act : A Theoretical Introduction to Sociological Methods. 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall,

Fetterman, D.M. (1989). Ethnography, Step by Step. Newbury, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Fettes, Mark. (1992). A Guide to Language Strategies for First Nations Communities. Ottawa: Assembly of First Nations Language and Literary Secretariat.

Four Worlds Development Project. (1985). The Sacred Tree. Lethbridge, Alberta: University of Lethbridge

Gall, Meredith D., Borg, Walter R. & Gall, Joyce P. (1996). 6th Edition. Education Research: An Introduction. White Plains, N.Y.: Longman Publishers.

Jeffrey Deborah. (1999). Report and Recommendations of the Task Force on First Nations Education to the 1999 AGM. Presented to B.C Teachers' Federation Task Force on First Nations Education. (www.bctf.bc.ca/social/firstnations/legacy).

Jorgensen, Danny L. (1989). Participant Observation: A Methodology for Human Studies. Newbury, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

LeClaire, Nancy & Cardinal, George. (1998). Alberta Elders' Cree Dictionary. Edmonton: Co-published by Duval House Publishing

Little Bear, Leroy. (2000). Jagged Worldviews Colliding. Battiste, Marie Editor, Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision (pp. 77-85). Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

Little Bear, Richard. (1999). Revitalizing Indigenous Languages. Some Rare and Radical Ideas for Keeping Indigenous Languages Alive. AZ: Northern Arizona University: Adapted from a speech delivered at the Fourth Annual Stabilizing Indigenous Languages Symposium at Flagstaff, Arizona on May 2, 1997. (http://www.ncbe.gwu.edu/miscpubs/stabilize/)

Lofthouse, Norma. (1999). Effective Schools Research. Ministry of Education, Aboriginal Education Branch. Government of British Columbia. http://www.bced.gov.bc.ca/abed/research/esr/toc.htm

Marvelle, Nathan. (2001). Cultural Survival Internship. Retaliation and Reconstruction: The James Bay Cree's Success in the Aftermath of Development. http://www.cs.org/interships/cree.htm

Medicine, Beatrice. (1995). Canadian Journal of Native Education. Vol. 21. Prologue to a Vision of Aboriginal Education.

Oxford University. (1992). The Concise Oxford Dictionary. Oxford University Press, New York.

Piquemal, Natahalie. (2000). Four Principles to Guide Research with Aboriginals. Policy Options. December 2000. Montreal : Institute of Research on Public Policy.

Robust, Te Tuhi. (2000). Backing into the Future: Motatau Bilingual School. Canadian Journal of Native Education. Vol.24. No. 1. Vancouver: University of British Columbia.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Gathering Strength. Volume 3. Ottawa: Canada Communication Group – Publishing.

Royal Commission on Aboriginal Peoples. (1996). Looking Forward, Looking Back. Volume 1. Ottawa: Canada Communication Group – Publishing.

Sapsford, Roger and Jupp, Victor. (1996). Data Collection and Analysis. London: Sage Publications, Inc.

Shimahara, N. (1988). Educational Research: An Introduction. In Gall, Meredith D.; Borg, Walter R. & Gall, Joyce, P. (1996) (6th edition). . White Plains, N.Y.: Longman Publishers.

Slaughter, Helen B., Lai, Morris. (1994). Indigenous Language Immersion as an Alternative Form of Schooling for Children of Hawaiian Ancestry: Lessons from a Six Year Study. New Orleans: Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the American Educational Research Association.

Smith, Graham Hingangaroa. (2000). Maori Education: Revolution and Transformative Action. Canadian Journal of Native Education. Vol.24.No. 1. Vancouver: University of British Columbia

Spindler, G. (1987). Education and Cultural Process: Anthropological Approaches, (2nd edition). Waveland Press, Inc.

Spindler, G. (1982). Doing the Ethnography of Schooling: Educational Anthropology in Action. Holt, Rinehart and Winston, New York.

Spindler, G., & Spindler, L (1987). Interpretive Ethnography of Education: At Home and Abroad. Hillsade, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

Spradley, James P. (1979). The Ethnographic Interview. Toronto: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich College Publishers.

Spradley, J.P. & McCurdy, D.W. (1980). The Cultural Experience: Ethnography In Complex Society. Science Research Associates, Inc., Chicago.

Spradley. J.P. (1980). Participant Observation. Orlando, Florida: Holt, Rinehart and Winston Inc.

Stiles, Dawn B. (1997). Four Successful Indigenous Languages Programs. In Reyhner, Jon Editor, Teaching Indigenous Languages (pp. 148-262). Flagstaff AZ: Northern Arizona University. (http://www2.nau.edu/~jar/TIL_21.html).

Watahomigie, L. and McCarthy, T. (1994). Bilingual/bicultural education at Peach Springs: A Hualapai way of schooling. Negotiating the culture of indigenous schools, Peabody Journal of Education [Special issue], 69.

Western Canadian Protocol for Collaboration in Basic Education. (2000) Aboriginal Language and Culture Programs. Governments of Alberta, British Columbia, Manitoba, Yukon Territory, Northwest Territories and Saskatchewan.

Wilcox, Harry F. (1999). Ethnography: A Way of Seeing. London: Sage Publications.

Wolcott, H. (1987). On Ethnographic Intent. In G. Spindler, & L. Spindler (Eds.), Interpretive Ethnography of Education: At Home and Abroad. Hillsdale, N.J: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates.

**Appendix One**

**What are Cree Syllabics**

Cree Syllabics is a writing system that is used by many Aboriginal people of Canada. The following is a sample of the Cree Syllabics used in Asiniy Askîhk.

| | a | e | o | ă | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| | ᐁ | ᐃ | ᐅ | ᐋ | ᐦ |
| p | ᐯ | ᐱ | ᐳ | ᐸ | ᑊ |
| t | ᑌ | ᑎ | ᑐ | ᑕ | ᐟ |
| k | ᕿ | ᖁ | ᑯ | ᑲ | ᐠ |
| ch | ᒉ | ᒋ | ᒍ | ᒐ | ᐨ |
| m | ᒣ | ᒥ | ᒧ | ᒪ | ᐧ |
| n | ᓄ | ᓇ | ᓅ | ᓈ | ᐣ |
| s | ᓴ | ᓯ | ᓱ | ᓵ | ᐢ |
| sh | ᔑ | ᔓ | ᔕ | ᔖ | ᐡ |
| y | ᔦ | ᔨ | ᔪ | ᔫ | ᐤ |

http://home.istar.ca/~jjspence/whatis.ht

**Appendix Two**

The following is a syllabic chart used in Nîpisiy Askîhk.

| VOWELS | | | | | CONSONANTS |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| ∇ e | Δ i | ▷ o | ◁ a | ◁̇ â | |
| ∇ e | Δ̇ i | ▷ o | ◁ a | ◁̇ â | |
| ∇· we | Δ· wi | ▷ wo | ◁· wa | ◁· wâ | |
| ∨ pe | ∧ pi | > po | < pa | <̇ pâ | ˈ p |
| ∪ te | ∩ ti | ⊃ to | ⊂ ta | ⊂̇ tâ | ˊ t |
| ٩ ke | ۴ ki | ۵ ko | ۵ ka | ۵̇ kâ | ˋ k |
| ٦ ce | ۲ ci | ل co | ۷ ca | ۷̇ câ | ˆ c |
| ٦ me | ۲ mi | ل mo | ۷ ma | ۷̇ mâ | ˇ m |
| ٦ ne | ۲ ni | ل no | ۷ na | ۷̇ nâ | ˜ n |
| ٦ se | ۲ si | ل so | ۷ sa | ۷̇ sâ | ˚ s |
| ٩ ye | ۴ yi | ۵ yo | ۵ ya | ۵̇ yâ | ˙ y |

·= w  • = final w  ˛ = l  ˛ = r  ▪ = hk  ▪ = h  Δ̇= stress mark above vowel

School of Native Studies, University of Alberta, Native Studies #152

**Appendix Three**

Correspondence

April XX, 2001

Nipisiy Askihk
Box 5555
Nipisiy, Askihk
T0X 0X0

**Attention: John Doe, Band Manager**

**Re: Issues in First Nations Education:**

As a student of the First Nations Masters and Doctorate Education program at the University of Alberta, I am required to gather information at the community level relating to the issues and concerns regarding First Nations' education. One of the benefits to our community is the value of grassroots input for the development of future education and teachers development programs at post-secondary institutes. The material gathered may also assist Nipisiy Askihk First Nation in their future education program development and delivery.

This is a field-based initiative that requires that I live in my own community for a period of two weeks. The anticipated dates for this visit is May XX$^{st}$ to May XX$^{th}$, XXXX. The activities in this information gathering will involve discussions and interviews with Elders, community workers and the general membership, and my participation in any community activities.

As a member of this community I am aware of protocols and will honor these protocols with respect for our traditions. The resulting report will respect the confidentiality of the community and the community members. The name of the community and any participants will be kept anonymous.

If you have any concerns or questions please feel free to contact me at your convenience.

Sincerely,

Ethnographic Research

cc: Chief and Council
Attachment: Consent Form

Date :_____

**INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM**

This interview is conducted by a University of Alberta student, with the consent of the University program The intent of this interview is to identify community concerns relating to First Nation Educational Issues. The names of the interviewees and the community will remain anonymous.

I understand the purpose and thereby consent to this interview.

Signed:_____

Printed Name:_____

**Appendix Four**

**DESCRIPTIVE OBSERVATION FORM**

**Date:** _____

**Time:**_____

**Setting:**_____

**Activity:**_____

| Field Notes Coding | Observation | Setting Description |
|---|---|---|
| | | |

**Appendix Five**

## The Proposed Exploratory Immersion Project

### A. Introduction

Nipisiy Askihk can turn language and culture loss around. If the parents, Elders, teachers and local governing bodies work in synchronicity with each other to passionately build on the common vision of revitalization, then the Nipisiy Askihk community will enjoy similar successes to these four models. Just as, individuals benefit from positive role modeling so can Nipisiy Askihk benefit from the positive role modeling of Asiniy Askihk. Role modeling is a traditional method of teaching. Aboriginal children are taught to use skills of listening, observing and doing. Consistent with the rules of the culture - role modeling, learning by observation and non-interference must be adhered to in this proposal.

Immersion of a number of Nipisiy Askihk members in the Asiniy Askihk atmosphere creates the traditional setting to observe and learn. Whether Nipisiy Askihk accepts Asiniy Askihk as an alias and/or role model is yet to be determined. The point is Nipisiy Askihk will benefit by the first hand exposure to the reality of possible success. By seeing and experiencing a bicultural model founded in the Cree language and traditions, the community members can return home to make informed choices about the future of their language education. At this point, even though members are aware of the impact the loss of language is having on their community, they are unaware of their options beyond government intervention in the system schools.

#### 1. Selecting Participants

Based on the assumption that a proposal for further research is consider the following recommendations are presented. Key community influencers from Nipisiy Askihk assume the roles of the researchers. As a participant observation group, they will travel to Asiniy Askihk for a two-week immersion in their cultural camp. These key people will act as community representatives doing research for the rest of their community. By immersing themselves for a short

period and then returning home with stories of the visit and a video presentation, the community can better evaluate their situation and make informed choices concerning the education of their youth.

It is recommended that applications for inclusion in this group as a participant observer representing Nipisiy Askihk will be distributed by the administrative component of this project. These calls for applications will state all relevant criteria and expectations that the applicant must meet (such as role in the community, education or research experience, etc.). The community representative's attitudes toward language revitalization, willingness to participate, availability and community connections will be determined by an interview and survey conducted on-site by an interview panel. The panel will consist of stakeholders from each area: the Aboriginal ethnographic researcher, an Elder, representation from the potential funding agencies and the Director of Education from the community. Permission to audio and videotape any subsequent interviews during the immersion experience will also be sought.

In order to ensure a good cross-section of Nipisiy Askihk, participants will be selected based upon their gender, age, cultural background, residence, willingness and availability. The goal is to locate representation from each of the following groups: parents, educators, decision-makers, Elders and children. By including two people from each category a balanced community response survey can be collected as a follow-up to the excursion.

The selection of participants according to Spradley, lists "five minimal requirements for selecting good informants: (1) thorough enculturation, (2) current involvement, (3) an unfamiliar cultural scene, (4) adequate time, and (5) nonanalytic" (Spradley, 1979, p.46). Therefore, participants in the immersion trip must understand Nipisiy Askihk's existing culture, they are residents of the community, they must be willing to experience the unfamiliarity of Asiniy

Askihk, they will be required to dedicate adequate time to the research and they will approach the activities with an open mind.

## 2. Research Methods and Implementation

The first stage of research will be completed with the collection of ten attitudinal surveys from the selected community representatives before the leaving Nipisik Askihk. The second stage of research will involve ethnographic participant observation by the ethnographer and the community research representatives in the immersion group. During this trip the ethnographic researcher will participate and observe while completing field notes, conducting interviews and gathering audio/video tapes. The third stage is composed of evaluating the findings after a follow-up interview with each of Nipisiy Askihk's selected informants.
In essence there are three stages to this project:

- Participant Selection, Informant Consent, Interview and Initial Survey,
- Ethnographic Participant Observation Data Collection.
- Follow-up Interviews, Survey and Reporting

The ethnographic researcher will require the assistance of a project coordinator who will coordinate the organization of this project.

## 3. Significance of Further Research

This study will offer insight for Community Nipisky Askihk participants, members, researchers and other interested Aboriginal communities. A final presentation of findings to Nipisiy Askihk and possibly other neighboring communities will include a videotape of the excursion and a written report analyzing collected data. An open policy in the community will avoid problems and community frustration similar to the one discussed earlier in this paper. Questions like, 'What is this research, research, research?' will be addressed from the beginning. This early involvement in the design process is recommended by Aboriginal authors and is an essential component in Indigenous Research Methodology.